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CLUTCHING A ROCK ABOVE HER HEAD, SHE LEANED FAR OVER THE GIDDY EDGE AND SEIZED THE
YOUTH, WHOSE HAND SEEMED ABOUT TO RELINQUISH THE BUCKSKIN CORD.

The Tenderfoot Trailer;

OR,

Plucky Phil, of the Mountain.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "ARKANSAW," "CAPTAIN BULLET,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DESERTED.

"THAR'S no use talkin', pard. We've got to the end ov the string. Pluck ar' a good dog sometimes, but Go-back shows more sagacity. We've got one-half ov Sittin' Bull's tribe between us an' the fort now, the other half hover over us like the angels ov death. Look at Phil yonder, standin' with his back to us. I don't like to leave the young cap'n in this part ov the kentry, but we must go back er die whar we ar'."

These words fell from the lips of a burly fellow who addressed a group of rough-looking men from the top of a huge boulder among the Big Horn Mountains not far from Custer's ill-fated battle-ground.

Apart from the speaker and his little audience, with his back toward them, stood a youth who had scarcely completed his seventeenth year. He was handsome, athletic, and of course determined, for he had turned his back on men whose bravery had never been questioned.

"That settles it; they are going to desert me, and I can't blame them," he said to himself when the man on the boulder paused. "Their term of enlistment has expired, and I have no right to attempt to detain them. Besides, they believe my hunt in these mountains a useless one, but I shall persevere as long as the mountain trail can be found. Let them go back. I came hither to learn the fate of the wagon train or die. I am going to stay."

"Phil?" at this juncture called a rough voice, "We ar' goin' to vote on yer last propersition."

The youth bit his lip, but did not stir.

"Wal, you kin hear, anyhow. Now, pard, all who ar' in favor ov acceptin' the cap'n's terms an' goin' on till the end comes, say I."

Not a voice responded.

"Contrary, no."

Six negatives spoken at once, but in different tones replied.

"We go back, pard!" said the man on the stone, with a glance at the boy. "Mebbe the cap'n will let us say good-by, but I hope he will go back with us."

"I stay!" suddenly cried the youth, whirling upon the six. "Do not think that I blame you. Life is dear to every one. My place is here, yours, perhaps, behind the walls of some Government fort. Yes, I will say good-by."

He halted before the bronze men and held out his hand.

"There! don't argue the case over again," he said to them, thus putting a stop to their remonstrances. "Until I shall have ascertained the fate of every person in the train I will not turn my back on Sitting Bull's dominions. You

have voted to go back. Be men. Keep your determination."

The parting scene was soon over, and Phil Steele, or Plucky Phil as the men had named him, saw the veterans withdraw.

The sun had already descended below the top of the mountain at whose base the decision had been reached, and the cool shadows of evening lay around the boy.

At last he was alone; the men whom he had hired at the nearest fort many miles away were going back, leaving him on the mountain trail in the midst of the death-lands of the Sioux.

"Deserted but free!" cried the tenderfoot trailer, springing upon the rock lately occupied by the leader of the six. "I can follow my own counsels from this time. Advice will no longer be driven into my ears, and my camp will not be cursed by the voice of the grumbler. They were brave fellows, but I believe I can get along without them. I must!" he added, with a smile as he jumped from his perch and picked up the rifle that leaned against the rock.

"I can explore the pass, now," he said, starting off. "It will be a further advance into Sitting Bull's country, but what do I care? I am here to find or to die!"

These were brave words from one so young, but Plucky Phil had a right to use them.

After an hour's walk from the place of separation the young trailer reached the mouth of a kind of natural canyon. Dark shadows were creeping down the lofty walls, and if night had been an hour nearer, the center of the pass would have looked gloomy indeed.

"Forward!" cried Plucky Phil, as if addressing the men who had deserted him, and the next moment, with his rifle at full cock, he entered the pass.

Far above him towered the bush-covered sides of the canyon, but as he advanced objects became more distinct until he had no difficulty in picking his way.

"Here is where the red fiends might have attacked the train," he exclaimed, "for all could have been butchered in this canyon. I am getting close to the fatal spot. Something tells me this. Great heavens! I am here now!"

The last sentence dropped from the boy's lips as he suddenly recoiled from an object which his foot was about to strike, and standing aloof while a shiver of horror crept over his frame, he stared at a human skull, whose grin was as grotesque as it was horrible.

Other objects speedily confirmed Plucky Phil's exclamation. He had reached the scene of some massacre, for half-burned parts of wagons and bones of horses mingled with those of unfortunate human beings told the dreadful tale.

Not long after his first discovery the mountain trailer stood in the very midst of the scene.

"I pray heaven that I may find some hopeful sign," fell from his lips. "I wonder if they fought hard. Ah! can I doubt them when they were led by such men as Overland Dick and Old Policy? Here they were attacked by a thousand Sioux, no doubt, and here among the wagons they died one by one. All; I will not believe it without proof!"

He fell to work and overturned or examined every bone and piece of wagon that encountered his gaze.

"I shall bury them when I get through," he said. "Perhaps, in giving all these bones a grave, I may be paying the last tribute to Nora. Then vengeance!"

Half an hour later he leaned against the wall of the canyon and gazed sorrowfully upon the heap of ghastly relics he had collected.

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, as his look wandered from the pile. "One poor fellow at least crept from the awful butcher-pen," and the next moment he was stooping over the skeleton of a man which lay thirty feet or more from the spot.

After a brief examination of the bones, Plucky Phil was on the point of turning away when the glitter of something beneath the skeleton hand attracted his attention, and he unearthed a few inches of a soldier's bayonet.

The point was much worn as though it had been used on stone, and the youth mechanically glanced at the canyon wall at the foot of which the steel had been found.

A lot of mountain creepers met his eye, but putting out his hand he brushed them aside to utter a cry of discovery.

On the stone thus brought to view were numerous scratches which soon began to assume the shapes of rough letters, and oblivious of his dangerous surroundings, he dropped his rifle and leaned eagerly forward. He seemed to hold his breath while he deciphered the last work of the dead man's hand.

Letter by letter and word by word the boy trailer mastered the inscription, until at last he reached the end, having read these brief sentences:

"We were attacked yesterday by five hundred Sioux. Not one of our party escaped. I am the only one alive at this moment, and I am dying. Nobody may ever see this, therefore, we may never be avenged. We fought to the last. CAMPBELL."

The signature told Plucky Phil that the "last man" had fallen back from his task exhausted and really dying.

He knew Campbell, the leader of the ill-fated train, and a man who deserved a better fate; but notwithstanding the assertion that no one had escaped, a look of doubt remained in the boy's eyes.

"I will not believe it! I cannot!" he cried. "The trail of a thousand hunters would end here, but mine does not. It only begins. I admit that Captain Campbell ought to have known all, for he lived till the day after the massacre, but I am going to doubt his dying words. I will avenge you, captain. Those five hundred Sioux are my bitterest enemies. Woe to their great chiefs if an Indian hatchet touched Fora Dalton's head that day. They have named me Plucky Phil, and the time for me to honor that name has come. First, sepulture; then, the long hunt and revenge."

Under a huge rock which at one place jutted from the canyon wall at its foot, the collected bones of the people of the train were placed, and the hands of the youthful trailer heaped earth and stones upon them.

Then he went back to his rifle.

For a moment he looked toward the end of the pass at which he had entered, then he turned to the west—toward the unknown lands of the Sioux.

"The mountain trail is not yet ended!" he exclaimed springing forward. "The bones I have found would have kept the boys at my back. They deserted me a little too soon. But never mind. I am willing to hunt alone."

At that moment the sound of a human voice struck his ear, and he stopped and turned toward the eastern mouth of the canyon.

"The boys have followed me," he said in a low tone. "I ought to exhibit nerve and send them back again."

No, the six bronze men were not coming back.

"I've seen it forty times since, 'Tana," said the unknown voice; "but I can't make out a letter 'cause I'm no scholar. Mebbe you kin."

Plucky Phil heard these words, and then saw two figures approach the rock bearing Captain Campbell's inscription.

One tore the vines aside and turned a face of triumph to his companion.

"Thar, 'Tana! make it out yerself ef you kin!" he exclaimed.

Plucky Phil crouched in the shadows and stared at the pair.

CHAPTER II.

PHIL SHOWS HIS PLUCK.

THE light in the mountain pass was fading fast, and the man called 'Tana was mastering the inscription on the rock with no little difficulty. He was closely watched by the long-haired athlete whose bronze hand held the vines aside.

"Can't you make it out?" asked the latter.

"I might if the light was stronger, but it's going too fast to help me any. See here, Coyote, you know more about their fate than any one in these parts. There! don't start and say no. The telling of your story will not make us foes. If you did not take any part in the fight, you were there. I know it."

The mountain climbers having dropped from Coyote's hand, once more covered the lettering on the stone, and Coyote himself had started back and was regarding his companion with a look of indecision.

The men stood erect and faced each other.

"I am waiting for your story," said 'Tana. "Go on."

At the same time Plucky Phil caught a threatening gleam in his eye as he glanced at the butt of the revolver that protruded from his belt.

"I war thar, 'Tana, that's a fact," said Coyote, in a forced tone; "but I didn't lift a hand ag'in' 'em except to try an' save, an' thar I failed. You see we knowed all along that the train war comin'. Sittin' Bull's scouts kept us posted, an' long afore the attack took place we knowed all about the party. Hyar the battle took place—not much ov a battle either, fur the Injuns killed nearly everybody at the first fire. Then they charged down the pass, but a small number of men led by a lank fellar called Policy Pete gave a volley that emptied a dozen saddles. But the next charge the red niggers got to the wagons, an' then the usual work began. I rode up then to save a young gal what bad handled

a rifle durin' the hull fight like an old trapper, but I couldn't do it, 'Tana. The young bucks seein' what I war at turned on me, an' ef I hadn't pulled out, my bones would be yonder with them what they left behind in the fire."

To this narrative 'Tana and the unseen boy had listened with breathless interest. It was intended to give the death-blow to long cherished hopes. Coyote's positiveness told this, but his nearest auditor seemed to doubt.

"Are you sure, Coyote, that the girl was massacred after you left her?" he asked.

"She warn't with us when we went back," was the significant rejoinder. "Sittin' Bull took no prisoners thet time. I ought to know, 'Tana, for I war thar."

For a moment 'Tana did not reply, and when he for a second removed his gaze from Coyote's face, Plucky Phil, who had been watching it incessantly, uttered an ejaculation of discovery.

"Coyote is lying!" he cried. "'Tana, who ever he is, does not know how to deal with the rascal. The secret of Nora's fate has not been told. Those squaw-men like Coyote are not all fools. They'd sooner sell a lie on credit than tell the honest truth for cash. There! 'Tana is going at him again. He doubts still. I wonder why he is so interested in the girl who wielded the rifle in this bloody pass that day?"

'Tana did return to the charge, but Coyote could not or would not tell more about the attack on the train.

"I thought the writing on the rock thar might be of some value to you," he said to 'Tana; "thet's why I brought you hyar."

"It amounts to nothing so far as I can make it out."

"I'm sorry."

"Another lie!" said Plucky Phil to himself. "Coyote seems to be well supplied with the useful, but he'll sing another song when I get at him."

'Tana lost hope at last. Coyote was baffling him.

"I can't think of my plans as lost ones," the former said, dejectedly.

"I'm afraid you'll hev to, cap'n. Wouldn't I hev seen the gal ef she hed been carried off?"

"It looks that way."

"Ov course! The Government doesn't know fur sart'in what ever became of the train. Yonder it lies, 'Tana, men, hosses an' wagons all mixed together, an' thar hezn't been an avenger in these parts—none that I've heard ov."

"There is one here now!" fell in determined tones from Plucky Phil's lips, as he stepped from the shadow of his rock into the light that lingered in the middle of the pass.

Coyote and 'Tana looked up, caught sight of his figure and sprung to their rifles.

"Lift a weapon and drop dead behind it!" shot over the shining barrel of his own rifle. "I am not here to kill if I can discover, but my fingers are itching to touch the trigger of the rifle that covers the heart of one who rode with Sitting Bull to the butchery of Campbell and his people. Stand where you are, mountain pard. You have lied, Coyote. I want the truth!"

The eyes of the bronzed squaw-man burned with a tigerish glare.

The rifle of the young trailer covered his heart.

"Quick—the truth!" continued the boy, impatiently. "You know that Nora Dalton did not die that day. You have been lying to 'Tana, your companion, for a purpose. You sell me the same goods and I will pay you in bullets!"

'Tana was regarding Plucky Phil with eyes filled with astonishment. They had met for the first time, and as enemies at that. Their hunt for Nora Dalton could not make them friends.

From the boy he glanced at Coyote, who was in a predicament which he did not relish.

"Tell him the truth if you have lied to me," he said, in a low tone, to the squaw-man.

"I've told the solid truth," was the surly answer. "Why should I lie?"

The next moment the crack of a rifle resounded throughout the mountain pass, and Coyote, with a yell of pain, staggered back and dropped on the spot where Campbell's skeleton had bleached for two years.

"Winged, 'Tana!" he grated fiercely, looking up at his companion. "Give the young wolf a bullet. He'll bite you one ov these days ef you don't."

Spurred on by the idea of self-preservation, 'Tana turned and raised his rifle, but he found Plucky Phil standing not twenty feet away with a cocked revolver in his hand.

"Go back!" he said sternly to 'Tana. "Go back beyond where that yellow viper lies. I don't want your blood, although I may demand an explanation one of these days. You see I have not killed Coyote. A shot through the shoulder isn't a deadly one. He may live to serve you yet. Go back fifty paces, but first cast your weapons on the ground, the rifle and your revolvers. They shall not be lost if you behave yourself."

'Tana bit his lips and flung his weapons on the ground; then he moved backward past the helpless Coyote, but shot all the while flashes of vengeful eye-fire at the boy.

"Now, viper, I want the truth," exclaimed Plucky Phil springing to Coyote's side.

The eyes of the crippled squaw-man surveyed him from head to foot before he spoke.

"What do you want to know?"

"The fate of the girl who fought that day with the rifle. She was not killed. Your lies deceived 'Tana, but not me."

"You war listenin', then?"

"Yes."

"Wal, pard, the gal aren't dead."

Plucky Phil's eyes dilated with joy.

"Where is she?"

"You've got to find her."

"What! Beware, Coyote, your last trail will end here if you prevaricate."

"I'm lookin' fur her myself. Honest Injun, pard."

"She's been taken from you, then?"

"That's jes' it."

"By whom?"

"I don't know exactly, but I've got an idea."

"Let me have it."

"Sittin' Bull wanted the gal arter the massacre, not fur his wife, mind you, pard, but to help 'im in some kind ov a plot ag'in' the whites."

His red warriors tracked me fur months afore they found the gal. She's gone now; that's all I know. Ef I war you an' wanted 'er I'd fol'ler the old Sioux chief himself. I fancy you haven't made much by wingin' Coyote, though you've l'arned some news. The chap behind me ar' huntin' Nora, too."

"Tana?"

"Cap'n Montana, er 'Tana fer short. You two might pool yer issues ef it warn't fur one thing."

"What's that?" asked Plucky Phil with burning eagerness.

"You couldn't be friends ef you wanted to be," answered Coyote with a smile. "Ever hear ov Cap'n 'Tana?"

"Never."

"That warn't his name ten year ago."

"What was it?"

"Goldboots."

Plucky Phil sprung up with an exclamation that fixed Coyote's gaze upon him.

"What!" he cried. "My mother's enemy here fighting me?"

A great bound carried him clear over Coyote's prostrate body, and, revolver in hand, he rushed toward the spot to which Captain 'Tana had retreated.

But all at once he stopped and uttered a cry of disappointment.

'Tana or Goldboots had disappeared.

"Discoveries are made too late," he said. "The greatest villain on earth has escaped me. I may be compelled to form an alliance with Coyote," and he turned toward that worthy.

At that moment a series of Indian yells broke the stillness that reigned at the westernmost mouth of the canyon.

A bound carried Plucky Phil to Coyote's side.

"What does that mean?" he cried.

"Injuns, ov course. Mounted, too."

"I'm in for it now, but I'll stand my ground." Coyote shot the boy a look of admiration.

"Clean grit, by hokey!" he exclaimed. "Pick up my revolver, boy; then you'll hev two; but be careful who you shoot ef they ar' Injuns. Thar's sart'in to be a tall red-skin in the gang who may turn out the best friend a boy in yer fix ever had. Don't kill him ef you want to win in this mountain game."

Even if Coyote had not concluded, the youth could have listened no longer, for a score of mounted Sioux had dashed into view.

With two revolvers thrust forward, Plucky Phil awaited the onset. He could not escape discovery, and he might as well open the ball.

A minute later the first red rank saw him braced and defiant in the canyon path, and as the whole band discovered him, the two deadly revolvers began the conflict.

"I never ran! I never will!" grated the boy, as his fingers set the triggers in motion.

CHAPTER III.

POLICY PETE.

STUNNED and confused by the deadly work of Plucky Phil's revolvers, the Sioux fell back.

"The tall, slim red-skin—don't drop him!" admonished Coyote from the ground. "You'll need him afore the mountain trail ends er I'm a saint."

"I don't see him," said Phil.

"Mebbe you've dropped 'im already. Ef you hev, boy—"

Phil broke the sentence with an exclamation of surprise, for out from the Indian ranks had dashed a single horseman who was about to run him down.

Instantly the two revolvers went upward again and the days of the reckless rider might have ended there and then if Coyote's voice had not checked the boy.

"Don't, youngster; let 'im come on. He is the tall Injun I referred to. Lower your bulldogs and stand aside."

Phil obeyed.

A moment later the superb horse ridden by the slim red-skin was at his side, and the hand that closed on his shoulder lifted him from the ground.

"I told ye so," cried Coyote, witnessing the feat. "I'll see you later, boy. I like your grit, but I owe you a blood-debt which I'll hev to pay."

Plucky Phil did not hear the squaw-man's last sentence, for the Indian's horse was bearing him eastward down the canyon.

Out from the mountain gulch dashed the horse, into the grayish twilight that had succeeded the day. The mountain trailer still clung to the two revolvers, his only weapons, for his sudden journey had caused him to leave his rifle behind.

How could his fate be in the hands of his painted captor? In what manner were their lives to be united?

Once beyond the canyon, Plucky Phil began to scrutinize his captor's face. The painting of it was ludicrous in the extreme, and not of that kind so frequently seen among the warriors of the Sioux nation. The Indian's dress was nearly half "civilized," and, altogether, after an inspection of several minutes while he was carried on, Plucky Phil concluded that he had been studying a puzzle—a human enigma.

"Whoa! Rocket!" suddenly cried the Indian in a tone which dilated Phil's gray eyes. "It ain't my policy to travel all night, an' no piece ov horseflesh in the Big Horn hills knows that better nor you. By hookey! baby pard, what confounded policy brought you out hyar?"

Phil could not stammer a reply. His look was an impudent stare, seeing which a smile became visible at the corners of the Sioux's mouth.

"What yer lookin' at?" he asked. "Ef you war a photograph machine my picture'd hev been taken afore this."

"You are Policy Pete!" cried the boy.

"By hokey! you wouldn't starve ef you hed to guess fur a livin'," was the answer. "The anatomy now before you b'longs to Policy Pete. Policy is policy at all times. I'm an Injun now an' hev been fur nigh two years, er ever since I crawled from the train nigher dead than alive."

Plucky Phil could not repress an exclamation of delight.

"I know now why Coyote told me to spare the tall, slim Indian," he said. "You are my friend, because I am hunting for Nora Dalton."

"You hyar alone lookin' fur that gal?" cried old Policy. "Mebbe she's dead."

"No, she is not!" quickly cried the youth. "I forced the truth from Coyote after having given him a bullet in the shoulder. Ah! we shall hunt Nora together; we will stand by each other, and from what I've heard of you, I am not afraid to trust you in anything."

Policy Pete's eyes seemed to sparkle with satisfaction.

"One ov yer bullets clipped a lock ov my ha'r back yonder," he said. "I could hev finished you, but that wouldn't have been good policy. Afore we talk let us go down this little pass. I know a place, an' then I want to git some o' this Injun paint off my carkiss. Allus hev a policy; that's my doctrine."

Guided by the old guide's hand the horse turned into a gloomy trail which led the strange pair to the foot of a mountain where Plucky Phil slid to the ground to be followed by Policy Pete.

A full moon creeping over the tops of some trees of the mountain-side bathed the halting-place in a weird silvery beauty, and the young trailer watched his companion bathe his face in a spring that bubbled near by.

"Fortune smiles at last," he murmured, to himself. "She has brought me face to face with Policy Pete, the guide of Campbell's train. With him for an ally I shall succeed!"

When the lank guide turned from the spring and revealed his face Phil was inclined to smile. It still looked like an Indian's so far as coloring was concerned; mountain air and mountain suns had more than bronzed it. In the moonlight it looked almost black.

"Not ez purty ez a chromo," remarked Policy, noticing the boy's look. "Don't keep in the shade to save yer complexion. That's my policy. I war three weeks among the Sioux, an' nigh Sittin' Bull's headquarters, afore their keenest eyes thought I war somebody besides a squaw-man, an' consequently a white-hater. Sittin' Bull himself would hev hed a fit ef he hed dreamed that one ov the guides ov Campbell's train hed escaped, an' war within smellin' distance ov his flesh-pots. I war carryin' out a policy, keepin' still an' playin' squaw-man, but at last I j'ined the tribe ez a half-breed from the Mussel Shell region, an' they took me in, policy an' all, an' never asked for my pedigree."

Policy Pete paused to laugh over the recollection of his successful *ruse*.

"But Captain Campbell wrote on the rock that all were killed," said the youth.

"Did, eh? Mebbe he thought so, but when I crawled out from the burnin' wagons hacked and shot, I looked like a fellar whose policy hed about expired. It war a time—a time, boy, but I won't tell about it byar. You must tell me all about yerself. Ef you hev a policy, I want to know it."

Plucky Phil did not hesitate, but told the old guide how he had led, or rather followed, six men into the mountains on a hunt for the missing train, but especially for Nora Dalton, a young friend of his who had accompanied it. He narrated their adventures from the day of departure from the nearest Government fort to the desertion of the six, and continued his own up to the battle in the canyon.

"Now, yer policy?" said the guide, when Phil paused.

The youth blushed and smiled.

"I need hardly mention that I love Nora," he said. "Love has brought me to this place. My policy is to hunt for her till I find her—now that I know she lives—and then rescue her if she is in danger."

"In danger?" echoed Policy Pete; she is in danger. I know that much. Thar's but one livin' person in this kentry who knows exactly whar Nora is, an' he won't tell."

"He shall tell!" cried Phil. "You an' I will force the secret from him, Policy!"

"Now ye'r' gittin' off," was the reply. "Wait till I talk about that feller with the secret. In the first place, he runs the machine in these parts; he kin call ten thousand warriors into the field; he lifts his hand an' an army like Custer's is wiped out. He's a wolf an' a snake combined. He kin crush er tear, jest ez he likes."

You mean Sitting Bull himself?"

"The clothes fit 'im, don't they?" was the reply. "I mean Sittin' Bull, an Injun who knows the value ov a policy, fur he heasn't been without one fur forty years. He's workin' up one now what will prove a big bonanza fur him, an' Nora is to help him."

"No."

"Fact! I 'lowed you'd be surprised. Sittin' Bull knows whar Nora Dalton is. Coyote saved her from the train an' kept her a long time, but Sittin' Bull's red detectives ferreted her out, an' Coyote found the nest empty one mornin'. Yes, pard, ef you want Nora, you must ask the Sioux wolf fur her; but do you think he'll give 'er up?"

Plucky Phil's eyes flashed.

"Time shall tell!" he exclaimed. "I say that Sitting Bull shall tell me the truth. I forced it from Coyote in the canyon. I will wring it from the Indian king."

"Complete yer policy first," said the guide looking calmly at him.

"Where is Sitting Bull now?"

"On the Big Horn."

"Come, then! We have rested long enough. You are going to stand by me. So I must wrest a secret from the great Indian chief of the West before I can find Nora! I accept the task! I didn't think it would come to this when I started on my mission; but the ten thousand braves led by Sitting Bull do not daunt me."

These sentences fell calmly from Plucky Phil's lips. His eyes sparkled as he spoke, that was all.

"We'll make a policy on the journey," said Pete. "We can't get along without one."

"I've formed mine."

"Well?"

"We will go to Sitting Bull's camp, and at the muzzle of the revolver, I'll force the secret from the killer of Custer and his men!"

Policy Pete uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"That means death!" he said.

"Then death it shall be! I shall go alone—"

"Not while Policy Pete ar' in the neighborhood," was the interruption, and the bronze hand of the old guide fell reassuringly upon Plucky Phil's shoulder.

If the friends at that moment had glanced up the slope of the mountain they might have caught sight of a pair of eyes and a triumphant face destined to seriously interfere with their plans.

But they saw it not, and when they turned their faces toward Sitting Bull's camp, a human figure crept panther-like in their wake.

It was Goldboots.

CHAPTER IV.

IN SITTING BULL'S CAMP.

"WAL, hyar we ar' Plucky. Down yonder is the lion's den. Look a minute, an' tell me ef you feel like enterin'."

The speaker was Policy Pete, and, while he looked at the boy who stood at his side in the mountain trail, his long arm pointed downward toward a scene not unfrequently witnessed in the Big Horn country.

The sun was setting behind the trees at their backs, but light enough remained to enable the young trailer's eyes to note the beautiful valley below dotted with the grotesque tepees of the red-men. Groups of horses were visible at the edge of the great camp, and here and there moved the stately forms of their lawless masters.

Sitting Bull's camp was before Plucky Phil.

"Don't go off half-cocked," continued Old Policy, watching his young friend, who was regarding the scene in silence. "Take a good look at the hair ov the red lion. A man what goes down thar fur bizness must hev a clean-cut policy. Look to yer heart's content, Plucky, an' don't answer me till ye'r' ready."

"The sight is enough to daunt some, Pete," the boy said, facing his companion; "but the secret is yonder. That decides me."

"Jest ez I expected. Now let me strike a policy. I'll go down an' reconnoiter; you stay hyar. I'll bring back su'thin' about Sittin' Bull, never fear! He war hyar four days ago."

"Go, Pete!" cried the youth. "I want to get to work. I will wait for you here."

Five minutes later, in the deepening shadows of the mountain-side, Plucky Phil was alone, but the Indian camp was still visible. Policy Pete had vanished.

The old guide was not unknown in the Sioux camp. A hundred times since his escape from the massacre of the canyon, he had ridden across its boundaries, now in the ranks of the Indians, and now with the bronze squaw-men who came and went whenever they pleased. He knew that the band, faced and shot into by Plucky Phil in the canyon had not returned to the camp, therefore his strange rescue of the boy had not been made known to Sitting Bull.

He did not attempt to steal into the great village. On the contrary, he entered boldly, greeting in a rough voice several old acquaintances who lounged in the cooling shadows of evening.

Darkness found Policy Pete in the center of the camp. More than one Sioux dog had snuffed at his heels and eyed him suspiciously, but he kept on like a man with a mission.

All at once his well known name was spoken on his left, in a low voice to be sure, but to Pete it sounded like the hoarse boom of a canon.

He thought a second before he turned, and said to himself:

"Don't furgit yer policy, Pete."

Then he faced the speaker whose figure, not quite as tall as his, did not look much like a Sioux's.

"I might have called you Aggawam, yer Injun name," said the same voice as a hasty stride brought its owner to Policy's side. "We've all got red-skin handles, you know. Ov course you know me now."

"Coyote!" cried Old Policy.

For a moment the two men confronted each other in the faint light of the thousands of stars that glittered above the Sioux camp. The meeting seemed to delight Coyote—it annoyed Policy.

"Whar's the youngster, Pete?" suddenly asked the squaw-man.

"Oh, the boy I jerked from the ground in the canyon? I wish you'd go an' find 'im, Coyote. You've heard ov eels in yer time, hevn't you? Wal, he's one."

Did not the searching eyes of Coyote call Policy Pete a liar while he spoke? They seemed to contain anything but a look of credulity.

"He got away, then?" he said, feigning belief.

"Slipped through my hands like a weasel, an' afore I could find out who he war an' what brought 'im hyar. He winged you, eh?"

"In the shoulder. Thet's why I'm hyar, Policy. The plagued thing doesn't heal ez briskly ez I'd like to hev it do. I knowed you when I saw yer shadder. I've kept yer secret fur two years, but Sittin' Bull doesn't dream about you."

Policy Pete started at the emphasis, and the eyes of the two men met.

"You've been lookin' fur the gal ever since the massacre," said Coyote. "I've knowed it all along, an' while I kept her hid from Sittin' Bull, I watched you like a hawk, fur you wasn't playin' Sioux an' squaw-man fur nothin'. The old chief's outwitted both of us, Policy. How does that strike you?"

Coyote stepped back a pace and watched Policy Pete with an amused expression of countenance.

"He must hev the best policy," was the old guide's answer. "But we needn't discuss such matters hyar. I'm back to stay awhile. I'll see you in the mornin', Coyote; that is, ef you ar' goin' to play fair. You want the chief's secret. Without me you kin never git it. Never!"

Old Policy was moving away, when Coyote bounded forward.

"We kin git it to-night—you and me," he exclaimed.

Pete shot him a searching look, not unmixed with astonishment.

"Sittin' Bull is alone in the big white tepee. A hand at his throat an' a revolver at his head will tear the secret from him."

"That's a poor policy," said Pete, quickly. "I kin do better than that."

"Wal?"

"I'll go down an' tell him kinder mysteriously that the gal hez disappeared. He will go an' see fur himself ef he swallows the bait. He kin be foller'd."

"I like the plan. Shall we work together, Policy?"

Coyote was extending his hand to the gaunt guide.

"We'll shake arter the work, not afore it. Thet's never been my policy," said Pete, refusing the proffered hand. "I'll go an' tell the lie," he added, with a smile. "Kin you hev two hosses ready, Coyote?"

"I'll hev them ready."

"At the old rock."

"I'll be thar."

The two worthies separated, and Policy Pete, walking away, glanced over his shoulder at Coyote, but he had already disappeared.

The "big white tepee" of Sitting Bull was known to every visitor to, and tenant of the camp on the Big Horn. From it the red king of the great red nation of the Northwest had ridden to Custer's last battle-ground, and back again to its secret interior he had carried trophies of that memorable engagement.

A short walk brought Policy Pete in sight of the structure, which occupied the middle of a rough square, and was sixty yards from the nearest wigwam.

During his walk he had coined his story to the smallest particular, and confident that he would succeed, he stepped up to the tent and grasped the curtain that formed the door.

The next instant a figure darted from the dark ground just around the curve of the tepee and with the force of a tiger dashed against the old guide, who went back under the assault.

At the same time a yell loud enough to penetrate to the confines of the Sioux camp cut the air, and fifty human figures sprung into the square from each of its four sides.

"Stan' off! I kin hold 'im!" exclaimed the voice of Policy's assailant, whose left hand held the guide's throat with a gripe that threatened to sever his windpipe. "You ar' a purty set ov Injuns! When the fox is caught you're allus ready to fight fur the hide. No, sir-ee! I hold my fox till Sittin' Bull comes."

"Sitting Bull is here!"

Sure enough the imposing figure of the war-chief of the Sioux stood before Old Policy's captor, and the next moment the lank guide was hustled toward the chief. The merciless hand at his throat was paralyzing every nerve.

"Hyar's a snake fur you to kill," said the captor to the chief. "Look at 'im. You've see'd 'im afore, Bull. He's playin' Injun an' squaw-man jist ez it suited 'im ever since we struck Campbell an' his train in the deep gulch. He's the tall scout what helped Stanley along through the Yellowstone kentry—Policy Pete! I found 'im sneakin' into yer tent. He war goin' to find the white gal an' thet ef he hed to hold his revolver at yer heart. Take 'im, chief."

Policy Pete, suddenly released, had not recovered from his surprise when the red hand of Sitting Bull clutched his arm.

"White scout speak," commanded the chief.

"In one minute," said Pete, clearing his throat. "Honesty is the best policy when it wins. But I want a word with Coyote first."

He broke from Sitting Bull's gripe and started toward Coyote whose eyes danced triumphantly above his bronze cheeks.

"I war a fool to trust you," he said. "I might hev knowned thet a lone hunt war the best policy. You made the net when you first saw me. Wal, laugh while you kin, Coyote. I'm goin' to laugh last!"

"You, one of Custer's scouts, laugh when Sittin' Bull is through with you?" cried Coyote. "I wouldn't give a fox pelt fur yer chances to see the sun rise in the mornin'. You war goin' to kill Sitting Bull fur the white gal."

The last sentence was intended for ears other than Policy's. It brought the Indian king forward with a cry of vengeance, but the old guide held him off with his left hand.

"Policy is policy," fell from his lips as his revolver leaped from his belt, and before Coyote could divine his intention he was staggering from the deadly flash that lit up the savage square.

"Thar! I've done you a service, chief," said Pete turning to Sitting Bull. "Sparin' vipers like Coyote is 'tarnal poor policy."

CHAPTER V.

STRIKING A TRAIL.

THE faint echoes of Old Policy's revolver reached the ears of the boy keeping watch on the dusky mountain slope that overlooked the Indian camp.

They seemed to tell him that some misfortune had befallen the lank guide, and, as the hours wore away without bringing him back, Plucky Phil became convinced that something had gone wrong.

"Policy would not have deserted me," he said aloud. "I will stand by him," and looking to his revolvers, one of which he held in his right hand, he left his post, and began to go down the mountain.

He discovered as he neared the Sioux village or camp, that it was far from being quiet, and while he slipped from shadow to shadow in the vain hope of finding Policy Pete, he noticed flitting figures that commanded more than casual attention.

All at once he came suddenly upon a group of men whose dress as he saw it in the starlight told him at once that they were the treacherous Squaw-men of the West. It was well for Plucky Phil that he crouched and hugged the ground when he did, for the eyes of the bronze fellows might have caught sight of him.

"Sittin' Bull ar' goin' to turn 'im loose," said one. "He's convinced the old chief thet if he hedn't shot Coyote when he did, he'd hev found the gal, an' then thet big bonanza would hev disappeared like smoke."

"Coyote's over yonder tussling with death. I couldn't serve 'im any longer—nobody kin. The bullet went crashin' through his face. Thet's what a feller gits fur doin' the chief a service."

Plucky Phil heard all this and knew that some one—Old Policy, in all probability—had finished Coyote's career. The person whom Sitting Bull was about to "turn loose" according to the squaw-man must be the guide.

He waited to hear no more, but left the angry group and glided away hoping to find Sitting Bull whose presence he thought would not be far from Policy Pete.

So the handsome figure of Captain 'Tana continued to remain motionless beside the tree. He might have touched Coyote by putting forth his hand, and certain it is that he heard every groan of pain that welled from the squaw-man's heart.

All at once Coyote uttered a terrible oath and almost fell from the rock upon which he had partially drawn his figure.

"Where is Rosa?" he exclaimed. "If she doesn't come soon I'll pass in my chips afore I kin mount my hoss."

Montana saw that the man on the rock was wrestling with death.

"I allus 'lowed that death would never give me a fair deal," he grated, looking at the dark stain now on the starlit rock—his own blood. "If Rosa did come back now she couldn't help me. I'm at the end ov my string; in other words, Coyote, death rakes in the biggest pot ov the game ov life."

The man rolled from the stone and lay on his back with his face upturned to the stars. His hands clutched the ground in his agony.

Montana sprung forward, and as he bent over Coyote, the eyes of the two men met.

"You?" cried the squaw-man, attempting to shrink away. "You want to know whar the gal is? You wouldn't try to be my avenger."

"By Heaven, I will, Coyote!" said Captain 'Tana. "First, tell the truth about Nora Dalton, and I'll hunt your slayers down."

"No! arter you hed found the gal, you'd go back an' be Goldboots the Pacific Nabob ag'in," said Coyote, turning his head away.

"I wouldn't!—I swear—"

"I'll tell Rosa, not you!" was the interruption. "I'll put her on Nora's trail an' leave you to find it. The person what will not avenge me must hunt fur the gal on his own hook. Besides, you'll be hunted like a mad-dog afore many days."

"By whom?"

"By one who found only a few hours ago that you war Goldboots, an' ef that person hasn't got a big account ag'in' you, then Sittin' Bull doesn't like rum."

"You betrayed me, then?"

The rapidly-glancing eyes of Coyote shot Montana a look of defiance.

"I told him that your old name war Goldboots!"

A curse fell from Captain 'Tana's lips, and his hands darted like the talons of a vulture at the squaw-man's throat.

"You'll hev to tighten your grip ef you beat the bullet!" grated Coyote grimly.

"Gods! I will!"

A gurgle and a gasp followed the exclamation, and the mad eyes of Montana saw death put an end to Coyote's career.

His hands were still at the throat of the man beneath him when he heard the neigh of a horse, and looking up he saw Rosa, the Sioux girl, leading two steeds.

He had time to leap up when the red maiden saw him and drew back.

"She mustn't escape me. She may already know the secret!" fell from his lips, and the next instant he darted forward, clutched the girl's

arm, and continued: "Go yonder and look at Coyote. I tried to keep life in him till you came back, but death wouldn't let me."

With a cry that seemed to fill her eyes with flashes of fire, Rosa dropped the leatheren bridles of the horses and sprung to Coyote's side.

There he lay, staring at the stars, dead!

She knelt over him with woman's tenderness, and seemed about to imprint a kiss on his bloody face, when she was seen to start as though a serpent had hissed under the squaw-man's head.

Had she seen the finger-prints on the throat?

She wheeled upon Captain 'Tana, and with finger pointing to Coyote, asked in a strange voice:

"White brother here when Coyote die! What he say about Rosa—what word him leave?"

"He said that we should hunt the white girl together," said Montana, through whose brain a certain idea had flashed like a beam of light. "We shall be friends and help one another, Rosa."

"Coyote say so?"

"Yes. I am going to hunt the man who sent the bullet into his face."

"And the boy, too?"

"May I die if I forget one whom I have cause to hate!" was the answer.

"Who are you, white man?" Rosa asked.

"I am Captain Montana, but you shall know more of me by and by. Are you ready for the trail now?"

Rosa sent a look toward the silent man on the ground, then went toward the horses.

"Rosa is ready to hunt for the white girl who stole Coyote's heart!" she flashed.

Montana started at the look that filled her eyes as she spoke the sentence.

"I must watch her," he murmured. "She hunts Nora Dalton to kill her. I have linked my fortunes for the present to those of an Indian Jezebel; but I shall prove able to thwart her when I have used her awhile. Now," to Rosa, "let us be off."

He was already in the rather comfortable Indian saddle which the Sioux girl had placed on one of the horses for Coyote, and Rosa was at his side.

But the hand of the red princess, instead of taking up the rein, fell on his arm, and their eyes met.

"Just before Coyote died a snake crawled across his throat!" she said slowly.

Montana recoiled with an exclamation of terror. He almost lost his balance.

"Rosa will forget the crawl of the snake," she continued, without abating her fiery look; "she will not slay the serpent if he hereafter crawls for her."

"Now, more than ever, must I watch this scarlet viper," thought Goldboots.

The next moment they were off.

CHAPTER VII.

ROSA WIELDS A TOMAHAWK.

"I MUST confess that one cannot get along well in this Indian land without help," said Plucky Phil, who stood in the earliest light of the next day on the summit of a mountain spur which he had ascended for the purpose of ob-

taining a view of the country by which he was surrounded. "Perhaps I had better have remained at my post on the mountain-side, but the sight of that red-skinned dwarf riding toward Nora fired me with eagerness to follow him, and here I am. The red Caliban is far away; his horse has carried him to Nora, and I am here, as far from the fruition of my hopes as ever. I have made hundreds of new enemies since I invaded Sioux-land, and gained but one friend, but his fate, alas! is unknown to me!"

While the youth's words might indicate despair, he was far from giving up, although he was horseless on the mountain.

He had followed Sitting Bull's directions only to discover that the Sioux king had purposely deceived him—that he stood far from Nora Dalton, and in the center of a country which might prove a death-trap.

"I cannot stand here and look and think!" he exclaimed. "I shall retrace my steps until I find the hoof-prints of the dwarf's horse. Rain has fallen lately, thank Heaven! and the mountain passes will betray the Ape."

He went down the mountain and turned his face once more toward Sitting Bull's village.

He still had a right to be called Plucky Phil.

The sun came up over the jagged spurs of the Big Horn range and revealed the passes which the boy was compelled to thread. His eyes were constantly examining the ground.

All at once he started and dropped on his knees.

Before him were the unmistakable prints of hoofs.

Plucky Phil's eyes dilated as he gazed, but a puzzled expression crept into them as he gradually discovered that two horses instead of one had lately passed down the trail.

"I see!" he exclaimed, rising. "Some person is following the red Caliban. The Sioux chief himself may have taken a notion to carry out the commands he gave the Ape."

The next moment Plucky Phil was hurrying down the newly-discovered trail. His long journey during the night had not exhausted him. A devouring flame seemed to flit through his veins.

"Somebody has got to die on this trail," he said to himself. "One thing I know, I shall never turn back."

On, on he went, guided by the hoof-prints plainly visible in the yielding earth of the mountain trail.

"Halt!"

Loud and clear the command rung out on the keen air, and Phil, who was at the time examining the trail, started up and drew his revolver as he sprung back.

In the path before him he saw the person whose lips had parted to utter the brigand's orders.

"It is mother's foe, Goldboots!" ejaculated the young trailer. "I would know him among a thousand."

Then he attempted to move forward, but the man in the saddle before him sent his voice again over the leveled rifle which covered Phil's breast.

"Stand where you are for the present!" he said. "We can settle accounts at this distance,

I didn't expect to be followed by you in these parts, and when the echoes of Echo Gulch told me that somebody was behind, I never dreamed that it was you. That gulch, Rosa says, has doomed many a would-be avenger. So you know me as Goldboots?"

"I know you as the man who challenged my father because you were mother's foe, and slew him villainously by firing before the command. Is it strange that I should hate you? But I did not come into this country for the purpose of hunting you."

"Perhaps not, but you would not hesitate to send a bullet through my brain if you got the opportunity."

The flashing of Plucky Phil's eyes answered Montana.

"You are hunting lost Nora Dalton. So am I. It would hardly do for us to hunt her together. I have a partner already. I want you to see her. Rosa?"

A moment later Plucky Phil saw the Sioux girl ride into sight and halt in the narrow mountain path at Montana's side.

"Here she is, boy. What do you think of her?"

Phil did not reply. He was near enough to see the shapely figure of the Indian girl as well as to note the expression of her deep dark eyes. The latter were fixed upon him in a manner that rendered him uneasy.

"Rosa and I are full pards," continued Goldboots. "She was Coyote's sweetheart yesterday, and she knows that you're the boy who gave him a bullet. Therefore she holds you in high reverence," and the speaker laughed. "These Indian girls are regular Jezebels when you stir them up," he went on, "and Rosa seems to be taking a fancy to you."

Plucky Phil saw that while Goldboots spoke he had lowered his rifle and that Rosa the Sioux was advancing upon him.

Her horse came forward slowly, and the dark eyes of its rider were riveted upon him.

"I shall stand my ground and see what this red queen wants," said the boy to himself as he clutched his pistols with new resoluteness. "Fortune may be favoring me. She plays queer games in Indian land."

Rosa had almost reached Plucky Phil by this time; their eyes had met some time before and were still returning flash for flash.

Goldboots, seated like a statue in his saddle, looked eagerly on.

"White boy b'longs to Rosa the Sioux!" suddenly said the Indian girl, as her horse stepped beside the trailer. "Him hunts the pale flower that bloomed for Coyote somewhere among the mountains, and him shoot Coyote."

"Yes, I shot Coyote!" flashed the youth, looking fearlessly up into the dark yet beautiful face before him. "I shot him because he attempted to deceive me with a lie. I did not kill the worm, however."

"Coyote dead, though."

"Good! There is one viper less in Sioux-dom!"

For a moment Plucky Phil expected to be brained by the hatchet which Rosa held above her saddle, and raised his left arm for the purpose of arresting, if possible, the mad stroke, but it was not given.

He came abruptly upon the square, and at the same time a form appeared leading a horse by the bridle.

"Sitting Bull!" ejaculated Plucky Phil, recognizing at once the peculiar garments that distinguished the Sioux chief from the rest of his people.

The Indian did not look about him to see whether or not he was followed, but hurried away closely trailed by the youth, who kept the figures of horse and man in sight.

If Sitting Bull was going to quit the camp, why did he not mount? His action puzzled Phil, and he was further nonplussed on seeing the old Sioux meet a figure at the foot of a hill. This figure looked more like a toad than a human being, for at a queer call from Sitting Bull's lips it hopped from beneath a huge boulder, and sprung monkey-like upon the back of the horse which the chief had led to the spot.

"The Ape will go and guard the white girl!" Phil heard Sitting Bull say to the apish figure whose eyes glittered like two mad stars. "He will watch her closely, for thieves are on the trail. Does the Ape bear?"

A nod and a laugh replied, and before Phil could interfere, away went the horse with the red dwarf on his back.

The boy sprung up with a cry of dismay. The deformed was riding to Nora Dalton's hiding-place, and he had no horse with which to follow. To this hideous object, hunchback like Caliban, Sitting Bull had given at least one of his secrets; he had sent him away to guard Nora, and perhaps to kill her, although death had not been mentioned.

With such thoughts clashing in his brain, Plucky Phil heard the sounds of the horse's hoofs die away among the somber mountains. He saw only the figure of Sitting Bull erect in the starlight, and apparently listening with joy to the sounds rapidly leaving his keenest of ears.

Suddenly the chief turned toward the camp, and with a low cry the young mountain trailer rose and confronted him.

"Halt!" fell from his lips as he straightened himself in Sitting Bull's path, and thrust two revolvers into his red face. "One cry, one movement, and the Sioux nation will be chiefless at dawn. I am not one of Custer's avengers. Uncle Sam will pay you for that massacre if you obey me to-night. I am a boy hunting for the dearest friend one ever had. Shall I introduce myself, chief? My name is Phil Steele, or Plucky Phil since my life-hunt began."

The old Sioux allowed an expression of contempt to mingle with the look of rage that sat enthroned on his swarthy face.

"A white boy!" he cried. "Where from?"

"Fort McKinney latterly, but that is immaterial. Where will the Ape stop? That is what I want to know."

Sitting Bull started.

"The secret is in danger, eh? To be sure it is! I am hunting the girl you keep concealed. My revolvers are at your heart. Do you want your brains on the ground where you now stand?"

"White boy would never get the girl if him shoot Sitting Bull."

"I'd feel somewhat satisfied anyway," said Phil. "If I leave you dead behind me I'd have only the Ape to overcome. Don't you see? Besides, Nora can bring no ransom to you—force no treaty from the Government."

"White boy lie!" said the Indian. "Girl big white chief's child."

"That is just where you're fooling yourself. Nora Dalton's father was with the train. Some of your hatchets killed him. She has told you so a hundred times, no doubt. Her beauty makes you think that she is the child of some great personage high in power and authorized to treat with you on your own terms. She is fatherless Nora Dalton, that is all!"

"White girl big soldier's child!" persisted the chief, in front of the cocked revolver. "Her worth much to Sitting Bull and his people. White boy no make the chief of the Sioux give her up by a lie."

"That's plain talk," said Plucky Phil; "but let's proceed to business. Tell me where Nora is or by the stars above us I'll shoot you where you stand."

Did the Sioux chief suddenly discover that the boy of the mountain trail was in stern earnest? He might have seen the white fingers tighten behind the triggers of the revolvers.

At any rate, he turned half-way around and pointed in the direction taken by the mounted dwarf.

Plucky Phil held his breath.

"White boy may have Nora if she not big chief's child," he said. "Him go straight on to the first trail on his right. Ground soft there, and the feet of the Ape's horse will guide him to him. Him must fight the Ape, though."

"I will do that!" cried Phil; "but I will spare the hunchback for your future use."

"Sitting Bull care not 'bout that," in a careless tone. "The Ape can see in the dark like an owl. White boy have to look out for his claws and teeth."

The revolvers crept slowly down.

"One word more, chief," the young trailer said. "Who shot Coyote?"

"Aggawam."

"Where is he?"

"Aggawam go away; never come back to Sioux again."

Plucky Phil drew a breath of relief and joy. Policy Pete was free!

"Go find white girl now," continued Sitting Bull. "Take her back to the white soldiers."

"I will, chief."

A moment later the boy was traversing the trail along which the Ape's horse had left fresh footprints.

Where was Sitting Bull?

An Indian was bounding toward the Sioux camp. It was the wily head of the red nation.

Five minutes afterward he came back mounted on a fresh horse, across whose neck lay an elegant rifle.

The fire of rage and pursuit blazed in his evil orbs as the cavalry spurs strapped to his heels drew streams of blood from his horse's rowels.

At the rate he was traveling he would soon overtake Plucky Phil, but a human figure leaped suddenly into his path at the foot of the mountain, and while one hand clutched the bridle

rein, the other pulled the old chief from his perch before he could lift an arm to defend himself.

Sitting Bull fell heavily upon the ground, and his assailant leaped upon the horse's back with a coarse ejaculation of triumph.

"A man without a policy ar' no man at all!" said the victor. "Me an' Plucky Phil hev pooled our issues in this gal-hunt. If you want to eucher us, you'd better call out yer hull red tribe. Thet would be a 'tarnal good stroke ov policy. A most affectionate adieu, Sittin' Bull."

A laugh followed Old Policy's sarcastic good-bye.

The Sioux chieftain sprung up and grasped the rifle which had fallen at his side, but the old guide had already disappeared.

"Sitting Bull has ten thousand warriors!" he hissed. "They shall all hunt Aggawam, the squaw-man, and the young white wolf."

It was a formidable threat, but the next few days were to witness that it was by no means an idle one.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RED JEZEBEL.

THE man who was riding away on Sitting Bull's horse seemed to know that Plucky was ahead of him. Policy Pete had already congratulated himself on his sudden release by the Sioux king when he expected death for shooting Coyote in the presence of his master.

He had asked himself the meaning of Sitting Bull's unexpected clemency, but had been unable to give his mind a satisfactory answer. It meant something which Policy Pete could not fathom.

Back in the Indian camp, held down to a rudo pallet by four dark-skinned squaw-men, writhed the man who had betrayed Policy into the hands of the great Sioux. The pistol bullet had made a horrible hole in his face, and it was evident that his end was near. The wound received at Plucky Phil's hands had not yet healed, but it gave him no concern. The last shot had rendered him delirious, and he was accordingly fastened to the cot by means of cords attached to posts hastily driven into the ground by his friends, and left to writhe in pain alone.

"To pay Policy and the boy back, that's all I want to live for," he groaned. "I'm willin' to give the gal over to Sittin' Bull. I could never make her fall in love with sech a lookin' man like me anyhow, but I could strike the boy through her ef I war on my pins, couldn't I? By hokey! that's an idea, but hyar I am, a reg'-lar livin' sieve tied to a b'ar-skin and expected to be planted by my pards afore to-morrow night."

He was still bewailing his fate when the curtain of the lodge was lifted almost noiselessly, and the light footstep that advanced did not escape his ear.

"You never went back on Coyote yet, Rosa," he said to the slender girlish figure that bent over him. "Arter all I guess you're the best pard a man ever had. Can't you cut me loose? They tied me because they thought I war goin' mad, jest because I've got a bullet somewhar in my head."

The hands of the young Sioux girl were al-

ready at work on the ropes that kept the stalwart squaw-man down, but she suddenly uttered a cry of vexation and seizing a knife severed the lines at a blow.

Coyote with an exclamation of joy attempted to rise but fell back against his will, exhausted. Rosa put her arm under his head and helped him in the second trial which proved partially successful. Coyote succeeded in sitting up.

"Listen to me, Rosa," he said to the devoted girl. "I'm goin' to tell you the truth at last. You've allus suspected that I hed a gal somewhar that I rated over you. Wal you warn't mistaken, an' ef it warn't for that same gal I wouldn't be in this fix now."

The eyes of Rosa the Sioux fairly flashed.

"I want to git even with Aggawam and his young pard!" Coyote continued, "an' ef you'll help me—ef you prove ez true to me in the future ez you hev in the past—I'll let you do as you please with yer rival, the white girl."

"The white girl?" echoed Rosa. "Then Coyote did save the girl of the train and keep her hid from Sitting Bull?"

"Thet's jes' what I did, Rosa. Help me an' I'll turn the gal over to you."

The Indian girl sprung up.

"What must Rosa do for Coyote?" she asked eagerly.

"Bring two horses hyar; no! help me to the big rock at the edge of the camp, an' fetch the animiles to it. We will make a trail between us, Rosa, you fur the white gal, yer rival, Coyote fur Policy Pete an' his boy pard."

The wounded man was helped to his feet with difficulty and a few moments later he was tottering toward the westernmost side of the Sioux village. The arms of the Indian maid prevented him from falling.

"I feel that I'm worth ten dead men, Rosa," he murmured more than once. "Hyar we ar' at the rock, the place to which I war to hev brought the bosses fur Policy—in a horn! Now go an' git the critters. Don't let any grass grow under yer moccasins, fur the sooner we git started the sooner you'll see the white gal what hes robbed you of Coyote."

Rosa the Sioux did not hear the ending of the sentence, for she was hurrying toward the corral not very far away and the squaw-man sunk upon the rock grating his teeth as though by that means he could kill the pain which had suddenly darted through his head.

"I wonder what's become of Montana?" he said half aloud to himself while he waited for the girl. "I left 'im in the canyon jis' afore the red-skins charged down on the boy. He's huntin' the gal, too. I never thought Goldboots would spend so much time on a hunt like that."

If Coyote had glanced over his shoulder he might have seen the figure of the man about whose whereabouts he had just questioned himself. Standing slightly behind a tree was Captain 'Tana, whose eyes were fixed on the wounded man on the rock.

"This is luck!" he had already ejaculated. "I don't have to thrust my precious figure into the Indian camp in order to recover the girl's trail, but Coyote the liar falls into my presence, and if I do not disturb him I'll be likely to hear the truth."

back of a magnificent steed, was an Indian whose garments were more than half civilized.

He wore the traditional feather crest of the red chieftain of the bloody West, and the rifle which he held against his shoulder threatened Plucky Phil with immediate death.

"White boy brave as a bear!" crept from between the Indian's lips. "But him mustn't reach Sitting Bull's captive!"

The Indian, then, was the Sioux Napoleon himself, not at the head of the ten thousand warriors whom a few hours before he had threatened to turn loose on the boy, but all alone.

Plucky Phil saw not the red chief, nor did he learn of an enemy's presence in the glen below until the Sioux's rifle sent a messenger of death at his swaying figure!

A sharp cry parted the boy's lips as one hand left the rope, and he swung madly around like a person mortally shot.

The knife clutched by his teeth fell glenward and landed on the rocks under Sitting Bull's horse with a musical jingle.

The eyes of the Indian blazed with fierce triumph, and a sardonic expression became fixed on his face as he watched the swirling figure on the buckskin cord.

"Him trail white girl no more!" he said. "Sitting Bull wonders how his eyes found the lodge hidden in the wall."

Suddenly the young trailer's hand slipped and his body dropped to a level with the gaping mouth of the cave.

Sitting Bull saw the movement and instinctively looked at the ground as if to see where the body would strike.

The next moment, however, he uttered a cry of astonishment.

A hand had darted from the cavern and seized Plucky Phil's shoulders.

It was not the copper-colored hand of his Caliban, but one small and white like a woman's.

"Girl find 'im!" cried the amazed chief. "Her try to pull him into the cave. Where is the Ape?"

The question was still unanswered when the body of Plucky Phil was drawn into the opening, and Sitting Bull, gazing from his saddle, saw only the rope swinging to and fro above the cave.

For a moment he did not stir.

His eyes were still staring upward, and he had not recovered his self-possession.

Suddenly a cry of warning came down from above, and the chief of the Sioux nation recoiled as a human-like body shot toward him from the opening above.

A second later, so swiftly it descended, it struck him a resistless blow, hurling him to the ground before he could lift an arm to turn the horrible missile aside.

Although bruised and nearly senseless, Sitting Bull managed to gain his feet.

His first glance was at the cavern's mouth, his second at the object writhing on the ground scarcely ten feet away.

Yes, the bomb from the cave in the wall possessed life, and a fierce look flashed in the Sioux chief's eyes as he recognized the misshapen body of his red messenger—the mountain Caliban.

"The white trailer has found his grave!" he hissed. "The child of the big white soldier will yet help Sitting Bull make the kind of peace he wants!"

The chief walked to where the dwarf lay, and as their eyes met, the little fellow gave a whine, and clasping his master's feet, fell dead.

"Not now," said Sitting Bull, glancing at the cave. "The warriors must be kept back. They shall not discover where Sitting Bull hid the white flower."

He sprung to his horse, and the next moment was riding away as though sounds of an approaching force had reached his ears.

At the mouth of the glen he leaped suddenly erect, and, with a loud cry and uplifted hand, halted what appeared to be an army of mounted red-skins.

CHAPTER IX.

BRAVE NORA DALTON.

WHILE Plucky Phil was preparing for the hazardous descent to the cave in the wall, scenes that should not be overlooked were transpiring there.

Sitting Bull had chosen a secure hiding-place for the prisoner whom his red detectives had wrested from Coyote's power.

Nora Dalton hoped, when she found herself in the hands of the Sioux chief's agents that the day of liberation was not far distant; but when she was conveyed to the wall-cavern despair took new possession of her heart. Instead of liberty she was immured in a new prison guarded at times by the Indian dwarf whose eyes ever possessed the baleful glare of the serpent's.

A hundred times she had tried to convince Sitting Bull that she was simply Nora Dalton, the only child of a man killed in the attack on the wagon-train in the canyon. But her beauty rendered her assertions valueless in the eyes of the chief who maintained that she was the daughter of an officer high in command. The old chief believed that the Government was about to inaugurate a campaign of vengeance for the Custer massacre, and hoped that by holding Nora he could secure terms which otherwise would not be accorded.

For months the rock cave had been the lost girl's abode. Since her recapture from Coyote, her sole visitors had been the dwarf and his master, the latter to see for himself that she still remained in his power, the former to watch her with his evil eye.

"You may come here once too often!" Nora had said to herself scores of times as she watched the misshapen guard whose body was revealed by the light that constantly burned on the floor of the prison. "One of these nights I will try to lasso the stake on the top of the cliff and leave you to your dreams."

She made the attempt when she thought the mountain Caliban asleep, but she found the rope too short for her purpose, and as she was jerked from the opening a wild laugh of triumph rung in her ears.

She had to desist, feeling that the deformed guard never slept.

Nora was the sole occupant of the cavern on the day of Plucky Phil's arrival. She had almost ceased to look down into the glen, for nobody ever entered it, no one with a white skin, at least.

The body of the dwarf swung suddenly into the mouth of the cave, and Nora started at sight of his face. It was all excitement.

"Ah!" she thought, "Sitting Bull considers me in danger. The Ape shares his master's fears," and her heart beat faster than it had beat for many a day.

But as the hours wore on without bringing a rescuer to her rocky abode, the soldier's daughter feared that after all her hopes had been raised in vain. The guard never left the mouth of the cave. Squatted like a toad at the entrance, he kept watch on the glen below.

All at once Nora saw him spring back and pick up a heavy boulder which he bore to the opening. The next moment he launched it at some object and leaned forward to note the effect of his throw.

A cry of bitter disappointment parted his lips as he drew back. The stone had missed its intended victim.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Nora, who could not but think that the person below must be her friend. "I trust that you have revealed my hiding-place, hideous atom!"

The Ape turned quickly upon her and advanced with an animal-like bound.

"The Ape kill the hunter who looks for the white girl!" he cried.

"That is not true!" was the fearless response. "I heard your expression of disappointment. You cannot deceive me. Your missile missed your enemy and my friend."

A threatening display of sharp teeth was the dwarf's reply.

"If your foe was crushed by your boulder, you will let me look," she said, advancing toward the opening.

"White girl stay back!" and the dwarf threw himself in front of Nora Dalton and menacingly lifted his long arms.

If his body was small and misshapen at that, in those apelike arms lay the strength of a giant, and as Nora persisted in looking into the glen he sprung at her with a cry, and threw her rudely back beyond the fire.

The poor girl lay stunned where she struck, until consciousness gradually returned, and her first glance at her persecutor was a flash of resentment.

"I have endured too long already!" she exclaimed. "I am convinced that the quartz rock was not hurled at an Indian. If I want to escape I must assist the friends below. I must vanquish the ogre who watches me."

The dwarf was at the cavern's mouth gazing into the glen. For once his eyes were turned from Sitting Bull's prisoner, and Nora mechanically threw a searching glance around the cavern.

As she was searching for a weapon of attack, none rewarded her gaze.

"Why did I not think of it before?" she exclaimed, as her eyes returned to the fire.

The next moment she had sprung to the blaze and drawn therefrom a burning stick. What

if the end she held seemed to blister her hands? She believed that she must strike now or remain the Sioux chief's prisoner still.

The dwarf-guard heard the noise made by the stick as it left the fire, and sprung up and faced the determined girl.

Nora braced herself, with the novel weapon drawn back for the blow.

A moment the little ogre faced her, then he jumped forward, with his apish arms extended to ward off the stroke. Nora retreated almost to the wall of the cavern, and struck madly at the outstretched arms.

At the same time there rose from her throat the piercing cry which reached the ears of the boy descending the rope against the outside wall.

Down went the arms as thousands of sparks flew in every direction, and Nora followed up the stroke with another which sent the red Caliban reeling across the fire-lit and spark-strewn floor. As he sunk like one dead at the foot of the wall, the scorching weapon fell from the girl's hands and she gazed at her work.

Suddenly the report of a rifle roused her, and as she looked toward the opening she saw a dark object appear in front of it and remain there.

"More foes?" fell from her lips as she went forward. "Merciful Heaven! am I never to see the face of a friend again?"

But the next instant a cry of another kind followed her question, for the figure swirling before the mouth of the cavern showed her a pale white face.

Clutching a rock above her head, she leaned far over the giddy edge and seized the youth, whose hand seemed about to relinquish the buckskin cord.

It took all Nora's strength to draw the young adventurer into the cave, but she succeeded, and the rope swung out again as Plucky Phil sunk with a groan on the ground.

The heart of Nora Dalton seemed to stand still when she knelt over the figure before her. The weird light of the fire fell athwart the boy trailer's face, to which sun and adventure had given a hue which she had never known it to possess.

All at once she seemed to recognize the boy.

"It is Phil!" she exclaimed, and the cry opened a pair of eyes that at once became riveted on her face.

"Nora?" asked the mountain hunter, in a half-uncertain manner, and then he touched the face whose eyes, sparkling with joy, seemed to burn his cheeks.

"We have met at last!" she exclaimed. "I often dreamed that you would come, but how could I look for you here?"

"I started out to find you. I had an oath to keep," was the reply, and the speaker's eyes glowed with enthusiasm as he continued: "The whole Sioux nation could not have kept me from you, Nora. I was bound to find you, although everything at first proclaimed you dead. I have Sitting Bull and his warriors against me. There is but one person save yourself in Sioux-land who is my friend, and Heaven alone knows where he is."

"Who is he?"

"Policy Pete."

On the contrary, the weapon was lowered, and the Sioux girl leaned forward and said in a low tone:

"White trailer find favor in Rosa's eyes. She come here to kill him, but she will make him a chief by and by if him go back with her to the great village of the Sioux."

Plucky Phil smiled.

"A proposition of marriage instead of the hatchet!" he exclaimed. "This is what I'd call a case of love at first sight. Fortune always had a singular way of befriending me. She hasn't forgotten it."

"What young trailer say?" asked the Sioux maiden, whose look now expressed the eagerness with which she waited for his reply. "Rosa stand between him and the red warriors. Him be big chief pretty soon."

"I must follow my trail to the end first, said Phil. "Until I have done this I cannot listen to your words."

The Indian girl looked dismayed.

"Boy go with Rosa, then?"

"May be so."

"Good! Him makes the heart of Rosa glad. She will have a chief to take Coyote's place."

"Was that yellow snake a chief?"

"Him never a chief for Sioux never trust him far enough."

"That's what I thought, but go back to your company. When I have reached the end of this mountain trail, I'll consider your proposition."

"Trailer go with Rosa now."

Plucky Phil started.

"Not while you stick to Goldboots," he exclaimed, darting a quick look at the man a few yards away. "We would be shooting at each other before we had traveled half a mile. He killed my father."

"Will trailer go with Rosa if she sends Cap'n Tana away?"

"For the present, yes," said Phil.

The Indian girl without replying turned her horse's head and rode toward Goldboots.

"What kind of bargain will the two make?" thought Phil who eagerly watched the red princess. "Goldboots will probably consent to disappear for a while, but at the first opportunity he will send a bullet after me. I shot the wrong man in the canyon; instead of Coyote in the shoulder, it should have been Goldboots through the head!"

Rosa had reached her companion by this time.

"You didn't touch him," said the Pacific Nabob derisively. "I expected to see you find his brain with that hatchet of yours; but his good looks unnerved your arm."

"Cap'n Tana knows nothing 'bout it!" resented Rosa the Sioux. "Let him look behind him and see a new enemy."

Instinctively Goldboots turned, and at the same moment the Sioux girl's hatchet ascended into the air. The next instant and while Plucky Phil held his breath, the weapon descended with crashing force on the adventurer's head, and he dropped from the saddle to the ground followed by the rifle which his nerveless hands could not retain.

Goldboots had hardly touched the earth when

Rosa turned a triumphant face upon the boy trailer.

"Cap'n Tana dismissed now," she exclaimed. "See! there is an empty saddle for the young white trailer."

"Great heavens! must I become the companion of such a creature?" fell from Phil's lips. "Yet I am in her power. I have no choice. She had no right to kill Goldboots. He belonged to me."

He said no more but went forward for the expression of Rosa's countenance was changing.

"Ah! young trailer now knows that Rosa the Sioux is his friend. By and by him become a chief among the red people."

Phil, who had reached the scene of the red girl's brutal blow did not reply, but vaulted into the saddle vacated by Goldboots.

"I will end this terrible acquaintance now," fell suddenly from his lips, and the next instant he whirled upon Rosa and caught her vengefully by the shoulder.

"What white boy do?" she exclaimed, alarmed at his compressed lips and flashing eyes.

"I propose to continue my journey alone!" he said. "I thank you for this horse, but you must stay behind."

The next instant Rosa uttered a wild shriek as she found herself wrenched suddenly from the saddle, and unable to retain her hold, she was hurled to the ground.

As she struck, Plucky Phil gave her a parting look and dashed away.

Not a moment too soon, for the pass behind him resounded with wild, savage yells, and a glance over his shoulder showed him twenty Sioux in swift pursuit.

"Better this than the companionship of that red girl!" he said to himself, as he clutched his revolvers more firmly, and leaned forward on his horse's neck.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMPLIMENTS OF SITTING BULL.

YELLS and arrows admonished Plucky Phil that to escape from the scarlet fiends now in swift pursuit, he must needs have a fleet horse. He soon discovered that fortune had sent him a steed on whose mettle he could rely, and before long the yells of the red warriors died away, and their best arrows fell far short of their intended mark.

But he did not check his speed.

What was occurring on the spot where he had left Rosa and Goldboots he did not know, for a bend in the mountain-trail hid it from his sight; but while he galloped on he could not but imagine the surprise of the Sioux on discovering Goldboots in that part of the country.

Miles away in a most lonely spot, Plucky Phil ventured to stop his horse. The animal had faithfully carried him from the jaws of death, and was not reluctant to obey his command.

"So far, good!" ejaculated the trailer. "A horse like my new prize is worth having, and he and I must become friends. Ah! if I had but possessed him when I started after the Ape, I might be nearer Nora than I am now. However, I must put up with fortune as it comes."

He had scarcely ceased when a heavy object

whizzed past his head and struck the ground with a thud that made his horse recoil.

"A foe above me!" cried Phil, as he looked up.

He had halted at the foot of an almost perpendicular ascent. The top was high overhead and fringed with bushes.

From some point far up the sides of the mountainous wall, or perhaps from the edge of the cliff, had been hurled the quartz boulder which had been intended for his head. Not a bush quivered to tell the lurking-place of his would-be slayer; the rock had not even disturbed a rock swallow on its downward flight.

A puzzled expression came into Plucky Phil's eyes as he gazed upward.

"That rock was thrown at me," he said. "It did not leave the wall of its own accord. Had it done so, it would have dropped straight down to the foot of the cliff. On the contrary, it was thrown by some enemy, some lurking Indian caught without his rifle."

He might have continued if he had not caught sight of a horrible human head which crept into view like the head of a snake from its den of rocks.

"Ah!" thought Phil. "The quartz boulder did not come from the top of the wall. I have found the den of a monster."

The head was all out now, and although it was many feet above him, he could see the snaky eyes that peeped from beneath the hair that framed the face like the matted mane of a lion.

"Heavens! it is Sitting Bull's Caliban!" cried the boy.

The discovery almost took his breath.

"Who would have looked for the ape in such a place as this?" he murmured, when the ogreish head was withdrawn. "Where the deformed is I will find Nora! Sitting Bull sent him to her last night. I do not wonder that Coyote failed to find Nora in her prison between Heaven and earth."

The boy trailer was not long in vacating the place. He feared that another attempt on his life by the cliff Caliban might prove successful.

He continued on down the road until he found a place at which he resolved to attempt to ascend to the cave in the wall.

The day was moving on, but the boy was undaunted. He left his horse at the foot of the ascent and began to climb upward.

His eyes beamed with eagerness and triumph. The mountain trail was nearing its end. He had found the hiding-place of Nora Dalton, and that was enough to cause his heart to beat fast.

He did not pause till he reached the top of the rock. Far below him lay one of the beautiful valleys of the Sioux-land. Down there Sitting Bull was plotting to run to earth the daring spirits who had dared to invade his domain, and dispute with him the possession of his fairest captive.

To find that part of the wall's edge directly above the mouth of the cavern was now Plucky Phil's object. Once or twice he leaned over the precipice, but saw only a perpendicular wall with swallows flying in and out like mountain bats.

The third time he uttered an exclamation of

horror and almost sprung back from the edge of the cliff, for that hideous red face was upturned to his searching gaze and the eyes of the Sioux Caliban were scowling at him.

Plucky Phil drew back and reflected.

The mouth of the cavern was about five-and-twenty feet below the top of the wall, and the young trailer's eyes saw no contrivance for reaching it. How, then, could one reach and return from it?

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, as his keen eyes fell upon a stout stake among the grass near his feet. "The Ape fastens his rope to this post and lets himself down over the cliff. I care not how he gets back; I will learn that after awhile."

He searched the vicinity of the stake for a rope, but in vain. He pried under boulders and hunted the bushes, but fortune did not favor him.

"The means for getting up are where Nora is," he said. "I must descend at all hazards!"

Resolved to reach the cave below, the boy doffed his stout buckskin hunting-jacket, and his knife was soon cutting it into strips. Each one was tested when cut to the proper length, and before long a series of knots had converted the strips into a rope, which was tried as a whole and pronounced satisfactory.

"I came to Siouxdom to find Nora Dalton!" he exclaimed, proudly. "Sitting Bull, you must hide your captive in places which a jacket cannot reach."

Once more he leaned over the fringe of the precipice, this time with a revolver clutched in his right hand.

It was his intention to drive a bullet between the eyes of Sitting Bull's dwarf, if the hideous face should again present itself.

But nothing save the dull wall appeared, and Plucky Phil drew back and fastened one end of his buckskin rope to the stake in the ground.

"Here goes for Nora or death!" he said, clutching the blade of a bowie with his teeth, and the next moment he was hanging alongside the wall between earth and sky, with a frail buckskin cord between him and eternity.

He held his breath and harbored his strength as knot after knot was successfully passed. What if the red Caliban would swing himself from the mouth of the cave and wait for him, knife in hand?

Of one thing Plucky Phil was now assured: The rock hurled at his head told him that the Ape possessed no firearms, and to this circumstance he probably owed his life.

All at once a cry that made his heart stand still pierced his ear.

It came from the cavern in the rock below, and was a long, loud cry for help.

Plucky Phil seemed to descend several feet at once.

"Vengeance is not far away!" he murmured. "Hold out a minute longer against the apish monster, Nora, and he will quiver on the rocks beneath the cave."

If the young traitor had glanced over his shoulder at that moment, and down into the glen from which he had discovered the cave he would have witnessed a sight terrible enough to pale the cheek of the bravest.

Seated on a blanket-saddle, fastened to the

boots. "Keep eyes and ears opon. In a few minutes you'll hear a shot an'a yell. When they come, leave the gang and dash down the first trail to yer right. Keep on fur a mile whether ye're hunted er not. You've been in tight places afore, cap'n. I saw you tried once. At the end ov a mile down the rig' t-hand trail, is a big tree, with a rock fast in the first fork. Ef you ain't chased to that point, wait thar fur me. You see thar's nuthin' like hevin' a policy."

"I'll be there!" said Goldboots, determinedly.

The withdrawal of Policy Pete from the band occasioned no comment. Indians were constantly leaving the trail.

Goldboots smiled when the figures of the old guide and himself disappeared. Might not Policy Pete be deceiving him?

Suddenly a shrill rifle-shot stopped the foremost braves, and a horse fell dead in his tracks. Instantly the whole band was thrown into confusion; the warriors leaped erect upon their horses' backs and cocked their rifles. The shot and the falling horse had checked the army in the narrow pass.

"The old fellow is as good as his word," ejaculated Goldboots, seeing his opportunity for a withdrawal, and a moment later his horse was bearing him down a mountain trail whose opening he had reached the moment of the shot.

"Let the white coyote go!" cried Sitting Bull, as a dash was made after Goldboots by a few warriors. "There is a snake in front of us whose sting is death."

The Pacific Nabob was therefore not pursued, and he kept on to the tree designated by Policy Pete.

He drew rein under the wide-spreading branches for a moment, and then dashed on again.

He had scarcely disappeared before the lank guide made his appearance.

"I sart'ainly heard a hoss," he said, looking around, "but Goldboots is not hyar."

Something on the trail under the tree attracted his attention, and after a brief inspection he rose with a prolonged whistle.

"I'm not the only man in these parts what bezz a policy!" he exclaimed. "Goldboots didn't keep the app'ntment, an' I ought to be kicked fur helpin' him out of his predicament. He'll hunt Plucky Phil with a vengeance now, an' never thank me fur my assistance. He won't forget the gal, Nora Dalton, either. It's a pity he hedn't lost the steel-lined cap ov his jes' asoro Rosa, the red wench, struck him with her hatchet!" and Policy Pete grated his teeth again as he looked down the trail whose sinuosities and distance hid the flying figure of the viper whose scalp he had in all probability preserved.

"We'll meet ag'in, cap'n," he said. "An' mebbe I'll take yer photygraph with the six-shootin' camera I carry about my anatomy."

They were to meet again.

CHAPTER XI.

BEFORE A KNIFE.

"WHAT shall we do?" gasped Nora Dalton, when she found her voice after discovering that the niche in which the dwarf had been in the habit of depositing the rope was empty. "The deformed always placed it there after reaching

me from the cliff above, and I confidently expected to delight your eyes with it, Phil; but, as you see, my hands do not clutch the prize."

The beautiful face of the girl was pale, and a look of fear filled her eyes.

"The Caliban changed the hiding-place of the rope at the last moment, that is all," the young trailer said. "We must search the cave for it; it cannot be far away."

He pulled a burning brand from the fire as he finished and turned to Nora, ready to commence the search.

"You know something about this cavern, Nora? It has been your home a long time. You had better take the torch and I will follow you."

The girl complied by taking the flambeau from his hand. She led the way to the niche, and showed him that it was empty; then they went on deeper into the earth until Plucky Phil stopped and touched Nora's arm.

"How deep is this cave?" he asked.

"Heaven knows," the girl said. "I have explored it until my limbs grew weary."

"Then there is no telling where the red dwarf hid the rope. Let us go back. We must trust to fortune and invention for escape."

They had taken up more than an hour in the search already completed, and, while Nora was reluctant to turn back without the rope, she did not oppose Plucky Phil's proposition, and back they went.

"Halt!" suddenly whispered the boy, and Nora stood still. "Our fire is out entirely. The main chamber has been invaded in our absence."

Invaded? The thought was enough to still the girl's heart, especially when she recalled the shot fired at Phil from the glen below.

The young pair listened in the darkness, but heard nothing. The light that entered at the mouth of the cavern did not extend far inward; it showed them nothing, because it possessed no revealing powers.

Silently Plucky Phil drew his revolvers and stood resolutely before the girl for whom he had hunted so long. Not a spark of the fire remained; it had been smothered as though by a buffalo-robe.

"The invader possesses more patience than I do," suddenly murmured the boy. "I'm going to put an end to this suspense."

He moved cautiously forward.

Nora, with a knife which had belonged to the dwarf, trod at his heels.

All at once, out of the gloom which seemed palpable, leaped an Indian, who fell upon Plucky Phil like an avalanche.

The boy staggered back under the assault, and, forced to drop his weapons, which were almost literally wrenched from his hands, he had no other alternative than to grapple with his assailant, which he did.

If the mountain trailer was a youth in limb, the mountain panther was not long in discovering that he possessed a man's strength.

Nora heard the tussle in the dark, but could see nothing. The combatants writhed like serpents at her very feet, and it was evident that each was depending on the arms and strength nature had given him.

When the desperate struggle reached its height,

the girl suddenly saw a human body swing into the light at the mouth of the cavern.

Another enemy.

Quick as thought, but without a cry that could alarm Plucky Phil or his antagonist, Nora sprung forward and reached the opening just as the new-comer set his foot on the edge of the stone.

"Back!" she cried as she pushed him out into mid-air. "Go and join your brother the dwarf. We don't want you here."

A curse—a white man's oath—followed her action and made Nora look more closely at the invader. Then she saw that despite his half-civilized garments he was a white man, although his face was a bronze one, and a great quantity of dark hair covered his broad shoulders.

As he swung back revealing his face, and a pair of eyes which were scintillating like twin stars, Nora Dalton instinctively shrunk away.

He regained his footing and spoke to the girl.

"I'm a friend!" he said. "You don't want to destroy me, do you?"

The girl could not speak.

It could not be possible that that handsome bronzed face belonged to a foe, and yet Nora did not feel like trusting him.

He released the rope while she hesitated, and stood before her in the uncertain light that surrounded them.

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed catching the sounds of the struggle going on between Plucky Phil and his red enemy.

"The boy and the Indian are at it like two bears."

"Yes, yes!" cried Nora. "If you are my friend prove it by helping the helpless."

She pointed toward the combatants as she spoke and the man sprung forward.

A bound brought him to the spot, and his hands easily distinguished the two grapplers. He possessed the strength of a Hercules for he tore the enemies apart, and Plucky Phil rose from the ground some distance away and wondered who had leaped to his rescue.

"You see I am your friend!" said the bronze-faced man appearing a moment later at Nora's side. "The boy is panting over yonder in the lark, and the chief I have choked into insensibility."

"The chief?" echoed Nora.

"Sitting Bull!"

"Now who are you?" she asked, but at that moment she seemed to recognize her helper. "You are Goldboots," she said.

The man's eyes answered her.

"Then you are not my friend," she continued. "Phil and you are mortal enemies."

He seemed to laugh.

"This is what a man gets for helping you. If had not caught Sitting Bull descending the rope out there he would have finished the boy and kept you his captive. His red army is not far off. I have hunted you ever since Camp-ell's train left Fort McKinney. You are the only girl who could get me to run into the jaws of death. I am Goldboots to that boy yonder, but the wild West and the gold slope knows me as Captain Montana the Pacific Nabob."

"I have heard of you," said Nora, returning

his triumphant look with one which told him that the prize was not yet won. "We cannot be friends now."

She stepped back.

"Hold on, my beauty!" he exclaimed, following her. "I've never lost a game when black eyes were the pot. You don't know Captain Tana. Why, I have hunted you too long to lose you at this time."

His hand shot forward to seize Nora, when between her uplifted knife and his eager fingers sprung a form from the gloom and a blow dashed him back.

"You win when you have conquered me, villain!" cried the boy, for it was Plucky Phil himself who had come to the rescue. "I am here to dispute with you the possession of the prize we both seek."

"Agreed, boy! To you I am Goldboots."

"The coward who slew my father because his manliness took Ellen Danton, my mother, from your power. I know all! Fate—fortune—has brought us together on the mountain trail!"

Straight as an arrow, although weaponless, Plucky Phil faced Captain Montana.

His weapons lay somewhere on the floor of the cave, and he had pushed back the knife which Nora had extended.

"Keep it. You may need it yourself," he whispered.

They stood face to face for a moment, then the fearless boy leaped at Goldboots, and bore him back before he could draw the revolver that rested on his thigh.

"There's a good deal of the tiger in you!" hissed the Nabob. "But you're no match for me."

This boast seemed true, for he tore Phil loose, and struck him a blow that sent him reeling against the wall behind the breathless girl.

"I might as well finish my work now," he said, drawing his revolver. "While the boy lives I cannot hope to make the girl the queen of the Pacific Slope."

But he found an obstacle in the shape of Nora Dalton in his way. The girl had stationed herself before Plucky Phil, and she stood erect with a warning look, and with the naked knife menacingly uplifted.

"Stand where you are, Goldboots," she said, sternly. "The knife I hold has probably hunted hearts before to-day. If you advance upon Phil Steele it shall hunt for yours."

"She's a fit companion for the young tiger," thought Goldboots. "I must deal the cards over and get a better hand. Knife is trumps now. I cannot afford to let it take the only heart I possess."

He did not shrink from Nora, but with his eyes fastened upon her, he began to plan another movement that would insure success.

CHAPTER XII.

ROSA SEVERS A ROPE.

SITTING BULL had left his band, hastened to the prison cliff, and lowered himself to the cave after his almost fatal shot at Plucky Phil.

Goldboots, whom we left hurrying from the spot where Policy Pete rescued him from his red captors, had returned to the trail, for he be-

"What! does he live?" exclaimed Nora.

"I saw him last fighting like a tiger among the wagons, and I have always thought that I was the sole survivor of that dark day's butchery. But where is he?"

"I do not know, but I am confident that he will turn up all safe some time. How glad I am to see you!" and the boy's eyes danced with pride and joy while they regarded the happy face before him.

"We are not free yet. Do not forget that," Nora said.

"That is true!" he said, springing up. "Where is my wound, Nora? Do you see any?"

The girl looked curiously at the straight boyish figure that stood before her.

"I see no wound."

"It is strange," Phil said. "I heard a shot; then my hands seemed to leave my rope and darkness came. My head hurts yet here," and he put his hand against the left side of his face.

"I see!" cried Nora. "There is a streak there. You may thank fortune, Phil, that the bullet came no nearer."

"Fortune still befriends me!" he said, smiling. "But one of these days she will entirely desert me. I cannot be always her favorite. We are not out of Sioux-land, Nora. The finding of you is but the beginning of peril. The men who followed me into this country got discouraged and went back. We must stem the tide of Indian cunning and deviltry alone, unless Policy Pete turns up to help us."

"There is Coyote."

"I am convinced that he is dead."

"Dead? He used to say that one of these days he would give me liberty."

"Instead of liberty he has given you the bitterest enemy a girl ever had."

Nora started and threw a questioning look into Plucky Phil's eyes.

"Your foe is an Indian girl," he said. "Did you ever hear Coyote speak of Rosa?"

"Many times," cried Nora. "She is the Indian girl whom he discarded when he found me. One day I was sitting at the mouth of this cave when I saw an Indian girl in the glen below. She was searching the wall as though she thought my prison was not far away. Such mad eyes I never saw before, and their vengeful gleam made me draw back with a shudder. I am convinced that that girl was Rosa, the Sioux."

"It must have been. May you never fall into her clutches, Nora, nor into the power of her late companion, if her tomahawk did not put an end to his career. I mean—"

A wild cry from the girl's lips made Plucky Phil turn, and just in time, too, for the dwarf was in the act of dealing him a blow from behind with the stick with which Nora Dalton had beat him off a few moments before.

Phil's first thought carried him forward, and he met the descending cudgel half-way, arrested its progress, and dealt the Ape a blow that sent him staggering away.

"I'll transform you into a rocket," he cried, seizing the deformed as he struck the ground, and the next moment he was bearing him toward the mouth of the cavern.

Nora held her breath.

At the edge of the opening Plucky Phil looked down and saw the Indian on the horse.

"You have just sent me your compliments, Sitting Bull; now take mine!" he exclaimed, and downward shot the ogre to knock the chief of the Sioux nation from his horse, as we have seen.

"I think I have deprived Uncle Sam of one red pest!" laughed the young trailer as he turned to the breathless girl, who had witnessed his feat. "A dwarf doesn't make a bad bomb shell. We must now think of escape, Nora."

A joyous cry burst from the girl's heart.

Escape! the word had never sounded so sweetly before.

Plucky Phil hastened back to the mouth of the cave and seized the buckskin rope which still dangled there.

As he jerked it, it parted somewhere, and a piece remained in his hands.

He turned and presented a white face to the girl.

"Do not let the accident frighten you," she said encouragingly. "We have the dwarf's rope to aid us."

As she finished, she bounded across the cave and put her hand into a dark niche in the wall above her head.

But the next moment she withdrew it with a shuddering cry.

The Caliban's rope was not there!

CHAPTER X.

OLD POLICY TRUSTS A SNAKE.

"I KINDER feel like a feller what had a policy an' lost it. Hyar I am astraddle ov Sittin' Bull's hoss in the middle ov nowbar an' alone. The boy didn't stay long on the mountain when I left him to smell round the Injun camp, for afore I struck Bull, I whistled for the youngster but he never answered. He's got too much grit fur these parts, an' it's the kind what euchers a chap out o' his h'ar."

The speaker was the redoubtable Policy Pete and a strange expression looked out from under his bushy eyelashes while he gave vent to his thoughts from the back of the horse from which he had lately jerked no less a personage than the Sioux chief.

Many a mile of narrow mountain pass the old guide had traversed, and it was not strange that calm reflection should make him feel like a man who had "no policy."

It was high noon of the day that witnessed the events of the foregoing chapter, and Policy Pete was not a great way from the spot where Rosa the Sioux girl dashed Goldboots to the ground with a blow of her hatchet.

The guide felt that he had left his young companion to a fate which might remorselessly put an end to his career, and he had about concluded to go back when the sound of hoof-beats assailed his ear and he turned his face to the West.

"Thar come the fellars what never want a policy!" he exclaimed, casting his eyes upon the army of Indians already in sight. "Git one yerself, Policy, er the little h'ar thet you want to keep may cause a sculp-dance in the Sioux town."

He instantly slid from the horse lest his posi-

tion in the saddle might subject him to discovery by the braves, and led the animal into a dense thicket where he fastened his cap over the moist nostrils.

"I kin git a policy when I'm out quicker nor any man west ov the Missouri," he said, with a grin as he moved back toward the spot from whence he had discovered the red cavalry.

It was a sight sufficient to make old Policy's eyes flash, for the whole plain below seemed covered with Indian horsemen. Straight as arrows the Sioux sat their well-limbed steeds.

"What would Uncle Sam give to hev a good battery planted hyar?" fell from his lips as he gazed and then as his eyes caught sight of a certain figure he exclaimed: "I thought the king bee would be somewhar among the swarm. Thar's Sittin' Bull himself, big ez life an' ez savage ez ever. What did he mean when he told me I could go arter boring Coyote through the face with my brain-opener? He had a policy in view when he dismissed me, not exactly with his blessin'—he never gave that to anybody—but without a blow on the head with his hatchet."

The guide continued to survey the stalwart figure of the Sioux chief as the cavalcade advanced at a smart gallop which soon caused it to strike the trail near which Policy stood.

With his finger at the trigger of a revolver, he saw the red army file past.

Suddenly his eyes dilated.

"Goldboots, by hokey!" he ejaculated. "I wonder whar the reddies made his acquaintance?"

Captain Montana was among the Indians, not exactly guarded though, but closely watched as Policy Pete could see.

"Thet's a part ov the policy, Sittin' Bull referred to when he told me that he would make that boy's trail the hottest one ov his life. Now he's huntin' the youngster with the wolves what chawed up Custer. It's bad enough to be hunted by Sittin' Bull alone, but when he's backed by the hull Sioux nation a man's sculp becomes mighty onsartain property."

The last look given by Policy Pete to the Indian band rested upon Goldboots whose presence among them puzzled the guide, but if he had witnessed the Nabob's overthrow by Rosa and his capture a short time afterward by the mounted Indians, the mystery would have been solved.

"I must foller that band. They ar' on the boy's trail now."

He went back to his horse but did not immediately untie him. He quickly transformed himself into a passable looking Indian by means of some pigments which he took from a deep pocket on the inner side of his half-civilized frock. He next threw the horse's trappings upon the ground, lest they should cause Sitting Bull to recognize his property, and with a buffalo cord which he produced, he speedily made a bridle and a bit, and a moment later was flying down the mountain trail not exactly in the wake of the Indian army, but parallel with its line of march.

"It's risky," he said, "but I never go back on a policy when I've once formed it."

Half an hour later he slipped from a crevice

among the hills and joined the cavalcade without exciting any undue attention.

By and by he nudged his way forward until he rode shoulder to shoulder with Goldboots.

The late Nabob of the Pacific Coast did not notice his new comrade until their eyes suddenly met.

Goldboots started at the mute questioning of Policy Pete's orbs.

"Whar ar' this brigade goin'?" asked the guide in a low tone.

"You'd better ask Sitting Bull," was the rejoinder, for Montana evidently saw no friendship in Policy's look.

From beneath the lank guide's eyebrows came the retort, which said:

"If you can't be civil, I'll leave you to your fate."

It brought the Nabob to terms.

"You are not a squaw-man," he said, looking at Pete.

"I hev been fur the last two years, that is I've been playin' the role fur policy's sake."

The guide's expression—his favorite one of "for policy's sake"—seemed to let a flood of light into Captain Tana's mind.

"I know you now," he said. "But can't we be friends?"

"We might."

"On what terms?"

"In ther first place, tell me why ye'r' hyar," said Policy, not noticing Tana's eager question.

A grim smile was visible under the Nabob's mustache.

"A red wild-cat knocked me from my horse, and these Indians came across me before I could avoid them. You know Rosa, the girl who loved Coyote?"

"Wal, I ought to. It war her tomahawk that did the tappin' I presume?"

"Yes, curse her!" grated Montana. "But thanks to a steel-lining which I wear in my cap, my skull was not broken and I live to throttle her one of these days."

"If she doesn't get the first call on you. What war the difficulty between you?"

Goldboots hesitated. Should he tell Policy Pete that he had seen Plucky Phil, the boy whom the old guide was probably hunting? No; he would not do that, and with this resolve a story carried to the minutest finish flashed through his brain, and it was launched at the man with a policy.

Policy Pete apparently swallowed the narrative without choking, and Montana was congratulating himself on the success of his ruse, when Peter's stained hand touched his arm, and his lips scarcely parted to say:

"I see you hev a policy, too, Montana."

The Nabob's eyes suddenly dilated.

"Never mind. Let us pool our issues, er, in other words, jine our policies. I kin git you out ov this red pack."

"Do it, and, by Jove! you will find Captain Montana at your back through thick and thin!"

Policy Pete said no more for a moment, during which time he had singled out Sitting Bull at the head of the cavalcade.

"I'll leave you now," he whispered to Gold-

another outlet flashed through his brain, he leaped into the gloomy aisle.

"To play this game to the last card; that's my intention!" he said. "Who wouldn't risk his existence for such a girl as Nora Dalton?"

The corridor narrowed as he advanced with a cocked revolver on a level with his heart and the torch over his head.

"Halt!" he said suddenly to himself. "This is the end of the trail."

His words appeared true, for the passageway had terminated abruptly, and Goldboots the Nabob stood nonplussed before a dark wall.

"Hello! what is this?" fell from his lips as a shower of sparks fell over him, for the torch which he had waved around his head had come in contact with some object. "By Jove! it is a rope!"

He could scarcely contain the joy born of this discovery.

A rope, not unlike the one by which he had followed Sitting Bull to the cave, dangled over his head like a hangman's noose, and it was this object which had been struck by his torch.

He seized the cord and tested it cautiously, as though he feared it might be some enemy's trap, but at length he put out his torch and with a naked bowie between his teeth, began to climb upward, hand over hand.

A few moments' work enabled him to rest on a narrow platform, a few feet above the floor of the cave proper, and he felt the rope slip from the rocky projection over which some band had noosed it, and heard it fall upon the extinguished torch below.

The loss of the friendly cord occasioned no alarm in the Nabob's heart, for he had already caught a glimpse of natural light overhead. Five minutes later he crept into the evening shadows from beneath a huge mountain rock, and felt a cool breeze fan his cheeks.

For some time Captain Montana stood in the gathering shadows, with the look of a detective who finds himself baffled by some shrewd criminal.

He could not think that Nora Dalton remained in the cave, for the rope told that Sitting Bull had escaped with the prize he had snatched from Coyote's hands. He stopped and examined the ground around the new opening, but he did not possess the eye of the lifelong trailer, and it told him nothing.

At one time he thought of going back into the cave, but the loss of the rope deterred him, and he was forced to remain above ground.

"I will find my horse first," he said. "One needs such an animal in this country every hour."

Having taken his bearings, he went over the ground and gradually descended into the valley, where he had concealed his borse after having seen Sitting Bull descend to Nora's hiding-place.

The sun had gone down, but the brief twilight that peoples the Big Horn Mountains with shadows remained.

The Nabob of the coast reached his horse, tethered where he had left him. The animal received him with a joyous whinny, and Goldboots had laid his hand on the rein, when he saw a piece of dirty paper protruding from beneath the girth-strap.

He threw a startled look around as his hand shot toward the paper, which he jerked from its strange envelope and began to unfold.

There was a scrawl of some kind on the dingy sheet, and Goldboots could not make out a word until he had subjected the ill-shapen letters to a close inspection.

Then this queer message was read:

"My policy ag'in' yourn, Goldboots! I'm a fool, an' ye'r a dog."

No signature. None was needed to tell Captain Tana by whose bronzed fingers the scrawl had been traced.

He tore the paper into pieces, which he crammed into the muzzle of the revolver his right hand clutched.

"I'm going to shoot his message into his head!" he grated. "I accept his challenge. My policy against his. I didn't expect to find him here, but such a devil as Policy Pete always turns up when one doesn't want him. However, I am prepared for him. He has given himself away by the letter. He is the fool he calls himself. His eagerness to talk about his bobby has got the upper hand of him again. That policy of his will kill him yet. My opinion is that he signed his death-warrant when he stuck that paper under my girth."

He mounted his horse as he concluded, and rode toward the place where he had emerged from the cavern. It was half a mile away.

As he entered a shadowy pass—the ground over which he was riding was very broken—he saw a dark figure glide from the right-hand side of the trail, and before he could cover the person he was looking into the muzzle of a revolver that touched his steed's mane.

"You got the letter, eh?" exclaimed the well-known voice of Policy Pete. "I kin tell that by the way you look. My policy ag'in' yours, cap'n, that's fair, ain't it?"

"It is fair when we both have an equal chance," growled Goldboots. "But you've got the drop on me now."

"Jes' ez if you wouldn't git it on Policy Pete ef you hed a chance!" was the cutting rejoinder. "Ar' you in a hurry?"

Goldboots said "No," out of curiosity to see what would follow such a reply.

"Thet suits me, because I want to show you a sight," continued the guide.

The Nabob started. Had Policy Pete discovered Nora?

"Jes' loan yerself to me fur five minutes," Pete said, taking hold of Montana's bridle, and as the girl-hunter did not object, the guide led the horse away.

A few yards from the scene of the meeting they left the path and app'ached the cliff from which Rosa, the Sioux girl, had hurled the hatchet at the venturesome sport.

"We're going back to the cave," said Goldboots to himself.

"Git down," Policy Pete said in a low tone, and the Nabob immediately slid from his horse. "Ef that ar' a genuine Injun boss he'll lie down an' keep still. Let me try 'im."

The long guide approached the animal, which obeyed his words and strokes, and was soon lying sidewise on the ground.

"He is too much the master of my horse," said the flashes that lit up Montana's eyes when he saw this display of authority. "He knows the animal too well for my own good."

The twain now went forward to the edge of the precipice.

Beneath them was the glen over which more than one of our characters had already hung suspended.

Goldboots glanced downward and started back with an exclamation of surprise.

A smile crossed Policy Pete's face.

"They're waitin' fur Sittin' Bull, the boss Injun ov this kentry," said the guide, whose finger was pointing down into the glen. "There must be more than six hundred ov 'em. The old chief guy 'em orders in the afternoon to wait fur 'im back yonder in the valley, an' they did so till they got fidgety an' moved up hyar. They ar' wonderin' now what's become ov Bull. Whar is he, cap'n?"

The question and the look that accompanied it sent Goldboots back with his hand on his half-drawn revolver.

The glen below was filled with mounted Indians. They were the red-skins who had annihilated Custer and his heroic riders. Their fierce looks and impatient movements had already told the Pacific Nabob that they would soon transgress Sitting Bull's commands and wait no longer for him.

"War my question too pers'nal?" continued Policy Pete, whose eyes had followed the Nabob's hand to the silvered butt of his revolver. "I asked you whar Sittin' Bull is. You ought to know."

"You know as much about the whereabouts of that red wolf as I do!" flashed Goldboots.

"Mebbe I do--not," was the answer. "The reds down thar hev mentioned yer name in loud tones fifty times durin' the half-hour. I laid hyar an' heard 'em. They cuss Sittin' Bull fur not lettin' 'em follow you when I hed given you an opportunity to escape. They'd like to ask you a few questions right now, cap'n, an' I'm goin' to send you down fur that purpose."

Out flew the Nabob's revolver, but Policy Pete's left hand clutched his right arm and the old guide's weapon looked again into his face.

"Policy is policy!" came over the death-freighted barrel. "A man without a policy ar' no man at all. Ef you h'evn't got one jes' now you'll need one within the next five minutes. You want the boy Plucky Phil, but the gal's the apple ov yer eye. What a queen ov 'Frisco society she'd make, cap'n! I'm doin' you a favor when I send you down to the Injuns, fur I'll be keepin' you out ov Rosa's road. Don't you hear the wolves growlin' down yonder? They'll go an' hunt Sittin' Bull pretty soon; won't stand it much longer. So go down an' quiet 'em, ef you kin!"

With the last word, the bronzed hand of the speaker gave Goldboots's wrist a wrench which caused him to utter an oath and to drop the revolver, which went off as it struck the ground.

The next moment Policy Pete pushed him to the very edge of the cliff.

"Jump, cap'n!" cried the guide. "You kin study out a policy ez you go down."

Mechanically Goldboots glanced downward

over his shoulder. Six hundred pairs of Indian eyes seemed to be fixed upon him.

"Jump! There's one chance in a million fur you!" resumed Policy Pete, coolly. "I'll send you empty-headed down thar in a minute. It's policy fur you, cap'n, to make the leap."

Montana's teeth fairly cracked as he grated them.

"Your infernal policy will suffer if I escape!" he hissed.

"Let 'er suffer!" was the tantalizing response.

The Nabob turned once more to the scene below, and then, with a half-smothered curse and an appeal to fortune for aid, leaped far from the edge of the cliff and shot downward toward the sea of upturned Indian faces!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JEZEBEL FINDS HER PREY.

A MILE or more from the spot upon which Goldboots emerged from the cavern, and at the time of his escape, the figure of an Indian girl threw a faint shadow against the white stones of a mountain pass as she crept forward with the stealthiness of the red race.

It was Rosa the red Jezebel.

Until dusk she had watched for Sitting Bull to leave the cave with his captive and her white rival, but her eyes had not been gladdened by such a sight.

Afraid to descend to the cavern, even if she had possessed a rope, for the Pacific Sport was there, she had left her post, and, with a faint hope of finding another outlet somewhere among the mountains, had searched the uneven ground behind the precipice.

Rosa's eyes were keen ones, and revenge seemed to have helped her observation.

The shadows of approaching night could not prevent her from seeing the trail that led from the hidden outlet, and the dark eyes of Coyote's love fairly flashed when they fell on the figure of Sitting Bull seated on his horse. The Sioux chief had recovered his prize, for on the strong neck of the horse he held despairing Nora Dalton.

Rosa's horse had been left behind. She was afraid to go back for it, lest the white girl should be borne out of sight and beyond the possibility of her vengeance. She noted the character of the ground over which the chief's steed was picking his way, and resolving to keep the pair in sight, she continued after the game she had discovered.

"Rosa has found the White Flower at last!" fell from her lips. "She will not lose sight of her until she has paid her for stealing Coyote's heart. When Rosa has paid her she will go back and kill the golden snake whose scales bore down on Coyote's throat so that he died!"

Looking with triumph into the half-shut eyes of Nora as he rode along, going further from his warriors every minute, Sitting Bull seemed satisfied with the result of his present mission. He had selected another hiding-place for his captive. There were a thousand places in his wild domain where he could conceal the girl through whom he expected to force a treaty with the vindictive whites. If he had believed

lieved that by watching the Sioux chief he would the sooner find Nora Dalton and his young enemy Phil.

In this respect he had not reckoned wildly, for by following Sitting Bull when that worthy withdrew from his band, he was enabled to discover the cavern. He left his horse when he saw the red chief lower himself over the cliff, and did not hesitate to follow him down the same rope to the white girl's abode.

These actions account for the presence of Goldboots the Nabob on the spot in time to interfere in the fierce scuffle going on between Sitting Bull and Plucky Phil. He was surprised to find himself confronted by the young trailer, although he knew that the boy still lived, for Rosa, the Sioux Jezebel, had preserved him from his (Montana's) aim.

The Pacific Nabob found himself in an unpleasant predicament when he stood before the menacing knife of the girl whose beauty had brought him into the territory of the Sioux. The loss of Campbell's train was known everywhere, and the sad fate of pretty Nora Dalton, the Pride of Fort McKinney, was mourned in the rich parlors of 'Frisco.

The words of a half-drunk Indian had caused Goldboots to leap up from a Denver gambling-table. Could it be that Nora Dalton was not dead? From that day he possessed a new aim in life. He would find this beautiful girl and take her to 'Frisco as his wife; he would set coast society wild, and he would keep her, too, at the muzzle of the revolver and the point of his bowie.

He had found her at last, but in the heart of Sitting Bull's domain, and she stood between him and his boy rival, with a knife raised against his heart.

Such an outcome of his hunt he had not expected.

Plucky Phil had evidently been knocked senseless by coming in contact with the hard wall of the cave. At least he made no noise, and this encouraged Goldboots.

"Well," he said to Nora, "I will let the boy go. He cannot baffle me, for did you not hear him strike the wall? I doubt whether his head would hold water just now."

The girl unconsciously uttered an exclamation of horror and lowered the knife. Phil might be dead, killed by being hurled against the wall by the Pacific Nabob.

She turned to find the boy, when a hand encircled her waist and a low voice assailed her ears.

"White girl never b'long to Goldboots!" said the voice, which caused Nora to stagger back as far as the hand would permit. "Sitting Bull make the peace he wants with her."

Nora could not speak.

The chief of the Sioux held her fast.

"Can't you find the boy?" called out the Nabob, impatiently.

"Sitting Bull got the White Flower!" was the answer, and the figure that stepped across the line of shadow thrust a revolver into Captain Tana's face.

"You're on deck again, eh?" ejaculated the Nabob, involuntarily shrinking from the shining barrel, behind which the dark eyes of Sitting

Bull danced like twin dervishes. "It will not do to half-kill an Indian, and I'm a fool for trying the experiment. I had you by the throat awhile ago, chief, and I might have sent you to kingdom come, but we were friends once, you know."

"An' that is why Sitting Bull would not let his braves hurt Goldboots when they found him wandering about after Rosa hit him with her hatchet," was the reply. "Then, again, Sitting Bull kept his warriors from followin' Goldboots when he rode away 'while ago. Goldboots forgets this."

"It would do me no good to remember your kindness, as I am to be shot down here," the Nabob said, sarcastically. "Blaze away, chief, an' lose one of the best white friends a Sioux chief ever had. Yes, shoot and forget that some of my money purchased the powder that helped to wipe Custer out."

"Sitting Bull no kill Goldboots, but him must go."

Montana glanced at the mouth of the cave. The rope was still dangling in front of it.

"He must go and keep from Sitting Bull's trail forever!" reiterated the Sioux.

Goldboots glanced at the shadowy form held firmly by the Indian's left hand, and hesitated. The cocked revolver looked him squarely in the face.

"Go!" thundered the impatient Indian. "The finger of Sitting Bull is at the trigger!"

The Pacific Nabob stepped toward the opening with an oath. Under his mustache he was savagely biting his lips.

"Never mind! we'll meet again!" he hissed over his shoulder. "When I next reach the eagle's nest I will take care to attend to the old bird first. Your days are nearly numbered, killer of Custer!"

There was no reply, save a defiant glitter in the eyes that still looked over the steely barrel.

Goldboots reached the edge of the corridor and caught the rope which now hung motionless above the abyss.

It had lowered him to the cave and it would certainly again bear his weight.

Driven to despair by the menace of the deadly revolver, the Nabob grasped the cord firmly and swung himself from the cave.

The next moment he was drawing himself up.

"All this risk for a girl who as yet doesn't care a whit for me!" he said to himself. "But she's worth the powder! Great Heavens! she's prettier than romance made her. How she would shine on the slope! What a belle of 'Frisco she would make. I'm not by any means struck, but I'd try to cross a gulch on a bridge of spider-webs if Nora was on the further side, a prize for me! The old chief thought I couldn't watch the cave! I can watch, and, by Jove! I can kill! I am going to do both!"

Goldboots, encouraged by his communings with self, was making good progress up the rope, but all at once all color left his face and his hands seemed to shrink from the cord.

He had cast his eyes upward to note his progress, and they had encountered a pair of orbs that possessed the glare of the panther's. They were full of malice and revenge.

Nor was that all,

Just below the red face that leaned over the edge of the cliff was a naked arm that held a knife against the rope!

"Rosa the Sioux!" gasped Goldboots.

"Rosa find the snake that crawled 'cross Coyote's throat before he died!" came down from the Jezebel's lips. "She hit him hard with her hatchet, but him must have an iron head. Now she cut his cord, an' him never crawl across throats any more."

"Cut it an' never know where the white girl is!" flashed Goldboots. "I have found and hid her. Cut the cord, you red viper!"

The knife instead of severing the rope shrunk away, and a new curiosity beamed in Rosa's eyes. But a moment afterward she ventured:

"Girl Hunter make a lie to keep Rosa from sendin' him down the rocks. She know where White Flower is."

"Then cut the rope and find her!" said Goldboots.

"She in the cave in the wall," was the Indian girl's response. "Rosa see Sittin' Bull go down rope; by an' by Girl-Hunter come along an' go down, too. Now him come up alone. Sittin' Bull drive 'im out, eh?"

"Girl-Hunter try to lie to Rosa, but him fail. She wait for Sittin' Bull. Him got another rope in the cave, an' by an' by him come up with the white girl whose pretty face took Coyote from Rosa long ago."

There was but one part of the Indian's last sentence that impressed the man completely at her mercy. The words "another rope" told him that the keen knife still clutched in her hand was going back to the work from which his manner had taken it.

He was not kept in suspense a great while.

"Rosa hunt white girl without Cap'n Tan' to bother her!" suddenly grated the red Jezebel, and the knife was drawn across the cord with a vengeance that told the Pacific Nabob how terribly woman can hate!

A wild cry—a shriek—rose to his lips as the rope parted, and the next instant he was falling along the wall with his hands clutching madly at every minute projection.

From above the glittering eyes of Rosa the Sioux vixen were following him on her terrible descent, but suddenly a cry of horror dropped from her tongue.

Goldboots had, a second after the severing of the rope, reached the mouth of the cavern, and his bloodless hands had clutched the edge of the stone floor, to which they clung with the energy of despair.

He hung between life and death by the frail hold of a pair of almost nerveless hands. If Sitting Bull caught sight of him a bullet or a hatchet would terminate his career, if the chief did not merely loosen his hands and let him continue his descent!

A glance upward showed him the revengeful face of his red persecutor.

"Oh, for a hand at that viper's throat!" grated Goldboots. "She dare not let me hang here in peace one minute. I am getting stronger and I shall soon be able to draw myself into the cave. Then a thousand Sitting Bulls cannot make me recoil an inch. She is going to finish her devilish work!"

It was time.

Rosa was leaning over the cliff with uplifted hatchet.

"Girl-Hunter wear no cap now to save his head!" he heard her hiss. "Rosa make his hands leave the step of the White Flower's lodge."

The next moment down came the hatchet!

As it left Rosa's hand Goldboots dodged at random, and the weapon missed him by the breadth of a hair, hissed past his cheek to strike the stones in the bottom of the glen far beneath him!

CHAPTER XIII.

POLICY AGAINST POLICY.

FORTUNE evidently still smiled on Goldboots, for his escape from the hatchet of his revengeful Indian girl was a narrow one.

A look of chagrin became visible in Rosa's eyes as she watched the bloodless weapon's descent to the bottom of the glen.

The Nabob's joy over his escape cannot be described.

By a masterly effort he raised himself above the edge of the cavern's mouth and stood once more on the stony ground over which Sitting Bull had lately driven him at the pistol's muzzle.

"Here I stay un till am ready to depart!" fell in defiant tones from his lips.

He looked around. In the shadows which deepened into actual gloom a few feet in front of him, he saw no one, and silence reigned supreme. Goldboots was puzzled, to say the least.

He drew his revolvers and held his breath while he attempted to fathom the mystery shrouded in silence and shadows.

A few short moments since he had confronted Plucky Phil, Sitting Bull and Nora Dalton on the spot now occupied by him. Ten minutes had not passed, but they were not to be seen.

Through the darkness came the glimmer of a coal as a burned stick stirred in the fire which the Sioux chief had almost entirely extinguished when he entered the cave.

Goldboots sprung to the spot and unearthed a few crimson embers which he fanned into a flame. He was convinced that he was the only living tenant of the cavern.

"I must find the red wolf's trail," he said, as he worked with the coals. "And to do that successfully I must have a torch."

When he had produced sufficient fire, his first steps carried him to the spot where he supposed Plucky Phil to be lying unconscious.

His eyes dilated with wonder when he searched the place, and found no traces of the young trailer.

"All gone!" he said. "If Sitting Bull carried Nora off he already has a foe on his track. I should have finished the youngster when I had my hand on his throat. Delays are dangerous. I was a fool to let the girl and her knife deter me."

He ceased and began to examine the floor of the cave with his torch. It revealed nothing; but all at once Goldboots sprung up and hurried away. A dark corridor had been revealed by his search, and as a thought that there might be

that Nora was but the humble child of an unknown man, he might not have been found riding down the mountain trail that day.

But no! her beauty made her the daughter of some one high in authority. She could not be of humble origin. Thus the head of the Sioux nation had reasoned a thousand times.

Where was Plucky Phil?

If he had recovered and was on the trail of his great enemy, no one seemed aware of it. Certain it was, though, that the mountain trailer was not in the cavern, for Goldboots after his forced return to it had failed to find a single trace of him.

Rosa the jealous girl appeared to be the only person who had found the chief's trail, and it was certain that she would follow it to the bitter end.

Down among the deeper shadows she went with her eyes riveted upon the horse and his double burden. More than once she was within rifle-shot, and her fingers played nervously in the trigger-guard as her eyes flashed, but the weapon did not touch her shoulder.

It was not until Sitting Bull stopped and looked back that she paused. Crouching beside a boulder, the Sioux girl eyed the chief as though he was about to disappear.

"White Flower near the new lodge," said Sitting Bull in response to a questioning glance from his captive.

"Always captivity!" sighed Nora, and a moment later an indignant light lit up the depths of her eyes.

"You dare not give me a gun—a pistol?" she said.

"What White Flower do?"

"If you did not then release me, your nation would have to elect another chief."

"White Flower shoot Sitting Bull?"

"Need you ask? A thousand times I have told you that I am not a general's child. My father fell in the canyon massacre. I believe you know this, but yet you affect to believe otherwise."

"Girl stick to story well," said the Sioux. "Her never born in common soldier's lodge. By and by her father come to Sitting Bull and say, 'Let the Sioux make their own terms. Give up my child and the Great Father at Washington will put his name to the strong paper.' By and by all this be done, White Flower."

"Never!" exclaimed Nora. "Were I the person you call me, I would never purchase my liberty on such terms!"

"We see!" was the sententious rejoinder, as Sitting Bull slid from the blanket and assisted his captive to alight.

Holding to the bridle and carrying Nora at the same time, the chief of the Sioux turned into a narrow trail which soon brought him to a place strewn with boulders of every size. Many were piled in heaps as though the hands of a race of giants had thus deposited them.

Stepping past one heap as he dropped his steed's bridle, the chief raised a net-work of mountain creepers and displayed the mouth of another cave to the gaze of the wondering girl.

"Another prison!" she thought; "but thank Heaven one does not look from its door into an abyss."

She was led into the place thus revealed with the red hand of the killer of Custer at her wrist. She could not take note of the corridor, for it was dark, yet the Indian knew whither he was taking her.

"I must inspect my new home," she said, with a smile, takin' up a torch after Sitting Bull had departed. "He has in some manner prevented me from escaping. I am satisfied that the opening behind the vines has been walled up with bowlders. Separated again, Phil! Fortune never smiles on us. Go back if you live, and leave Nora Dalton to her fate."

The young mountain trailer was not near enough to reply; but Nora knew that if he could have heard her, a ringing "Never!" would have fallen from his lips.

Her torch threw out a vivid light as she commenced her explorations.

The cave was a wonderful one, possessing numerous small chambers connected by narrow corridors, not unlike the caverns in certain portions of the Union east of the Mississippi.

"The Sioux king knows his dungeons well," ejaculated Nora, pausing at last. "I might as well go back to the fire and await the arrival of my new jailer. It will not be the dwarf this time."

"No! White Flower, the Ape is dead!"

The voice as much as the works made Nora Dalton recoil with a cry of terror.

As she sprung back, her torch revealed the speaker, not twenty feet away.

"I know you!" said Nora, recovering in a measure, although the glistening eyes of the Indian girl kept color from her cheeks. "I know why you came, too."

"Rosa help young trailer find White Flower!" exclaimed the artful girl, gliding forward. "Boy not far off, and she come to take White Flower to him."

But the chief's prisoner did not believe.

She recalled Plucky Phil's words.

He had told her that she possessed a bitter enemy in the person of Rosa, the Sioux. She knew too, why the red Jezebel hated her.

"You must stop where you are," said Nora, tightening her gripe on her torch. "You follow me because jealousy has lied to you. I was Coyote's prisoner, that was all. You were welcome to the brute."

She talked to a rock.

"White Flower no believe that Rosa come to take her to young trailer," she said, with a grin that disclosed her intentions. "Then she must know that Rosa come to pay her back for stealing Coyote's heart!"

Nora had not time for answer, for, with a cry and a panther-like leap, the scarlet Jezebel darted forward.

Madly the white girl struck with the flaming torch, but Rosa's arm warded off the blow, and before Nora could deal the second stroke she was in the hands of the jealous Sioux.

"What White Flower think now?" she hissed, glaring at her with the eyes of an enraged tigress. "White boy not far off, mebbe. We go see. Sitting Bull going back to his braves now, thinking that him hide his pale flower from all eyes save the Great Spirit's. Ah! Rosa followed him when he knew it not. She wanted

the dove whose pretty eyes stole the eagle's heart from his mate."

A moment later Nora was being dragged over the hard floor of the cavern. Torch and fire were left behind, and at length they stood beyond the vines, and in the light of the full, round moon that looked down over a broken mountain spur.

Rosa's eyes still flashed triumphantly, and the fingers that encircled Nora's wrist seemed to burn their way to the bone.

"Look and listen, White Flower!" suddenly exclaimed the Sioux girl, pointing down the trail.

"You see nothing," said Nora. "You hear the wind, and the moonlight makes shadows in the path. You should shade your eyes with your hands if you want to see anything."

Nora's heart seemed to stand still when her enemy's hand quitted her wrist. The Sioux girl was holding her shapely red hands above her eyes, and gazing down the path.

All at once Nora pushed the red Jezebel madly away, and before she could recover, sprung off with a fervent ejaculation to fortune for aid.

Her situation seemed to lend speed to her hopes, and she was flying down the narrow shadow-flecked path, when Rosa recovered and darted in swift pursuit.

"White Flower must wither on the mountain trail!" she hissed, as knife in hand she followed the fleeting figure of the girl she hated.

It was, indeed, a race for life with Nora Dalton.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MAN IN THE MOON.

"HELP! help!" burst involuntarily from the throat of the beauty of Campbell's train when she heard the footsteps of her mad pursuer.

To look back might be to lose a step, so she cast no glance behind.

The trail was straight, and the mellow moonlight revealed the mountain leaves that littered it.

Down upon her came the red Jezebel with the certainty of a doom which cannot be averted.

Still Nora kept on.

She did not possess a single weapon, else she would have wheeled and met Rosa face to face.

She kept on until the triumphant laugh of the scarlet vixen rung in her ears, until she appeared to feel the avenging knife in her back.

"I can go no further!" she exclaimed. "Fate has ever been against me, but it is better to perish in the light of the stars than in the gloom of an Indian cave."

Nora's heart had sunk within her, and all at once she fell exhausted at the edge of the trail.

Wild was the cry that pealed from Rosa's throat when she saw her long-sought victim in her meshes.

"Coyote's heart was the last one the White Flower stole. She will never steal another!" was the cry.

Nora saw the knife and its mad owner, beard the words just written as they fell hissing from

her enemy's tongue, and shut her eyes for the blow. Entirely exhausted, she could do no more.

She did not see the figure that leaped suddenly into the path between her and the Indian girl, but Rosa recognized the new-comer with a startling cry and drew back with the look of a baffled tigress.

"In time to baffle you, demoness!" said the rescuer, whose build and garments proclaimed his identity, and without pity he dashed Rosa's uplifted knife arm down with the rifle he carried and sent her stunned to the bushes that fringed the trail.

It was Plucky Phil.

"I couldn't kill the tigress," he said, casting a look upon the Sioux girl before he turned to Nora. "She abandoned her horse for some reason or other, and fortune threw the animal in my way, and therefore I reached this spot in time to keep her knife from Nora's heart. Poor Nora! She does not think me near."

A moment later joy beamed in Nora Dalton's eyes, for they were looking into Plucky Phil's face, and he was carrying her toward a horse a few yards away.

The boy did not speak until he had taken a seat behind her on the animal's back.

"Thank fortune for this meeting," he said, joyfully. "We are not out of the woods yet, Nora, but the mid-air cave has been left behind, and I trust we have seen Sitting Bull for the last time."

"And Rosa, too," said Nora, with a shudder.

"Aul you found her out," replied Phil. "She's more than fancy painted her, I suppose?"

"She must have loved Coyote."

"In her mad Indian way," the boy smiled. "It is the love which continually carries a knife in its hand."

The reunited pair were carried through the moonlight by Rosa's steed. Leaving the trail on the high land, they descended into a valley, through which the horse was carrying them at a brisk gallop, when Plucky Phil suddenly drew rein and cocked the rifle.

"Look ahead, Nora. There is a man in the moon," he said.

They were ascending a gentle rise, over whose summit the full-orbed moon was peeping, and photographed on the silver disk was the figure of a man and the head of a horse.

Nora could scarcely repress a cry when she saw the startling spectacle.

"White or red?" she asked, in low tones.

"That is what I cannot determine," said Phil, never taking his eyes from the apparition a minute. "I am going to find out, however."

He slid to the ground and left the reins in Nora's hands; then he crept forward and noiselessly up the little hill.

"I might have turned back," he murmured, "but turning back always puts a trailer on one's track in this country. Pete has taught me the value of a definite policy, but mine has always been 'advance! Never retire!'"

The man in the moon assumed almost gigantic proportions as Plucky Phil neared the summit of the hill. The boy now saw the strange skin cap that covered the head, but whether

the person was red or white he could not determine.

He was now on all-fours, creeping on inch by inch. A panther never approached its prey with less noise.

"I'll try the knife. I used to know how to use it," fell from Plucky Phil's lips as he laid the rifle down and drew the bowie. "The man in the moon is a squaw-man, therefore, a Sioux by nature. He is in my road, and the knife must remove him. I am throwing for Nora's safety. I care not for myself."

As the young trailer rose for the throw on which he had decided, he glanced over his shoulder and saw the dark figure of Nora's horse, then he caught the bowie at its point and hurled it straight at the apparition between him and the moon!

"Jehu! thar's another fellar with a policy!" exclaimed the stranger as the polished blade, turned from its path by fate, went flying past his face. "I'll jes' turn an' pit my policy ag'in' the one down the hill."

Plucky Phil started back amazed.

"I thank fortune for my bad aim!" he said. "I threw my bowie at my best friend. It is I, Policy—Plucky Phil!"

"Ther boy, by hookey!"

A moment afterward the gaunt guide was squeezing Phil's hand, and exhibiting a pair of dilated eyes beneath his bushy brows.

"Thet blade ov yourn, boy, nearly ended my policy," he said. "But whar's the gal?"

"Down yonder."

"You've got 'er at last eh? Thet's the outcome ov some good policy. I choked off one fellar's policy back yonder."

Plucky Phil's eyes threw a question into Policy Pete's face.

"It war Goldboots."

The boy started and looked displeased.

"I was going to turn on him by and by," he said. "He killed my father—forced him into a duel because he hated mother, and then shot him. But you have killed him, Policy; you have baffled me."

"He may live," said the old guide, "but—I doubt it, Phil."

"What did you do to him?"

"Oh, nothin' much. I jes' made 'im jump off a cliff down among six hundred red-skins," was the answer. "If he hed a cast-iron neck an' a good policy he may be livin' fur you, but it's almighty unsart'in, Plucky."

The young trailer did not reply, but turned his face upon the foot of the hill and the two went down.

"Whar's Nora?" asked Policy Pete, stopping suddenly and looking into the boy's face. "Thar's the hoss; but—"

A cry of horror from Phil's lips had broken the sentence, and a bound carried him to the horse's side.

The animal stood where he had left him, but Nora had disappeared!

For a moment he stood bewildered where he had halted, and then wheeled upon Policy Pete.

"Where can Nora be?" he exclaimed.

"Thet's a tough question, but a good policy will find her," Pete said. "Let me tell you suthin' I've been achin' to talk about ever since

I met you. This kentry is alive with red-skins. I war watchin' a sneakin' party while I war up thar on the hill. Goldboots must hev been in a condition to tell 'em who made 'im jump among 'em arter he landed. We may be in the midst ov the hull six hundred. Didn't I hear Sittin' Bull say that he would hunt you with the entire tribe one o' these days? Plucky, ef you ever take Nora from Siouxdom it will be with the full durned tribe at yer heels."

The boy's eyes flashed, and his lips met firmly as he clutched his revolver tighter and looked into Policy Pete's face.

"I always keep that threat before me," he said. "I came hither for Nora, and I will take her from this deathland if Sitting Bull and all his red allies oppose!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWIN MAZEPAS.

It was true that Nora Dalton had mysteriously disappeared. It was strange that she had been taken and the horse left.

Plucky Phil could not think that Rosa had followed them and recovered possession of her prey, nor did he believe that Nora had fallen back into Sitting Bull's hands.

"There is no trail here!" he said, as he rose from an examination of the path and fixed his eyes on Policy Pete.

"Wait till I pass judgment," was the response.

The boy watched the lank guide with bated breath while the old fellow paid his attention to the ground. Policy Pete took his own time, and was scrutinizing the trail when the boy bounded forward and touched his shoulder.

"Wal?" ejaculated Pete, looking up at the boy trailer.

"There are Indians in the moon. Look!"

Policy Pete obeyed.

"I told you the kentry war full ov the red niggers!" he said, after a glance at the silver world that peeped over the summit of the hill. "They're ridin' across the moon, as it war-gittin' 'round on our flank kinder like."

"Do you think so?"

Policy Pete sprung up.

"Look yonder!" he said, pointing down the narrow mountain trail. "Them arn't shadders, but Injuns!"

Plucky Phil instinctively lifted his weapon.

"We've got to take the hull by the horns, Plucky. We've got to ride through 'em. Thar's no gettin' round that."

"I'm ready," was the boy's reply.

"Thet's the best policy. The wolves are behind us, too. Git up on the horse."

An agile bound seated Phil on the Indian blanket.

"If this be deserting Nora, I do not move a foot," he said, looking down into Policy's face.

"It will be helpin' her in the end. We bev to hev strange policies sometimes, an' this ar' one ov 'em. Now go!"

"But you, Pete?"

"I'll 'tend to myself. It's a part ov my present policy. Ride straight ahead, ez if you heven't seen an Injun, an' when I whistle go off like an arrer."

Phil turned from Policy Pete and drew his

second revolver, so that he had one in each hand.

Obeying a whispered word, the horse moved away while the boy's ears were waiting to catch old Policy's signal.

All at once it came, a cry between a hoot and a trill, and the next moment he went down the trail like an arrow.

A dozen shadowy figures rose suddenly before him, but fear of being trampled under the horse's feet made them hug the trees that bordered the path, and Plucky Phil's revolvers spoke on either hand as he dashed along.

Policy Pete had not been mistaken; the shadows of the mountain trail were living Indians.

Further on the daring boy rode into a pack of human wolves. They filled the little glen; they sprung at his bridle with the yells of demons and tried to drag him from his perch. He shot at point blank range into the devilish faces that appeared on both sides, emptied his revolvers among the infuriated Sioux and almost liberated himself. But at that moment fresh reinforcements came up; the whole Indian army surrounded him. His horse was knocked down with a club and he was torn from the blanket and held firmly by at least twenty hands.

"Five hundred against one are odds too great," said Phil, as he turned a defiant face to his captors. "You dare not let me reload my revolvers and give me a show."

"White boy talk to Sitting Bull, presently," was the reply. "Him big chief, and mebbe him give young trailer his fast-shootin' guns ag'in."

"Show me your chief, the cause of my misfortunes," Phil said. "Where is this valiant chief of yours—the wolf that devoured Custer?"

At the name of Custer the whole party set up a yell and went through certain motions which told the mountain trailer that he had been captured by the red heroes of the Little Big Horn massacre.

Suddenly the ranks divided and Plucky Phil found himself in the presence of Sitting Bull. The boy started back amazed, for he had not thought that the Sioux chief had rejoined his command.

"White boy caught at last!" fell from the Indian's lips. "But him kill some braves before him yield."

"Who can avoid killing when he fights for life and liberty with a revolver in each hand?" was the quick response.

Sitting Bull nodded.

"Young white come into Sitting Bull's land from the forts of the white soldiers," continued the Sioux.

"Him hunt pale-face girl who came with the train across the great rivers. He would like to be safe in the forts now."

"Not without Nora," said Phil. "I shall not go back alone."

"White boy brave. Him never go back, mebbe."

"That is true! It all lies in your hands, Sitting Bull. I admit that. If you had not bidden Nora Dalton, the six dead warriors lying back ponder would be alive to help you in your next campaign. Give me liberty and Nora, and my back shall be forever turned on your land."

For a moment the Sioux chief did not speak. Plucky Phil watched him with deep interest.

"Put boy on Sudden Fire's horse," he said, suddenly turning to some Indians at his left.

A moment later Phil was lifted to the back of a fiery young steed which had been reluctantly yielded by a young Sioux.

"Tie 'im now!" said Sitting Bull.

The tying operation did not last long when twenty Indians took part in it. The haughty head of the Sioux nation looked on with a gleam of grim satisfaction in his eyes.

"White boy take a long ride," fell from his lips. "Young horse full ov fire, but him go like the wind with his mate."

"What does the red tiger mean?" ejaculated Phil, and then he thought: "He is going to make a Mazeppa of me."

Indian hands at the horse's head led the animal away, and the whole red army followed.

Plucky Phil's doubts were soon dispelled, for the band halted a few hundred yards from the scene of his capture. The mellow moonlight fell uninterrupted over the little dale.

"Ah! here comes the girl white boy been huntin'," said Sitting Bull, and the young trailer uttered a cry of surprise as his eyes fell on Nora Dalton, whose horse was led forward by two braves.

The recognition was mutual.

"Phil!"

"Nora!"

The horses were brought together, and the eyes of the young couple became fixed upon each other.

"You would not go back after you escaped from the mid-air cave," the girl said.

"Not without you, Nora!"

"We are going to leave Siouxdom together! Sitting Bull has determined to get rid of us."

"In what manner?"

"Heaven knows, but he has come to the conclusion that I am not an important person."

Before Plucky Phil could reply, Indians fell to fastening the two horses together at their heads, and he saw that Nora had already been lashed to her steed.

"Listen, white boy!" said Sitting Bull. "You came here for White Flower, whom Sitting Bull long believed to be a great white war-chief's child. Him know better now; therefore, him willin' to send you both out of his country. The horses know the way mebbe, but if they git lost the white trailer will see his flower wither in the mountains. While him ride away, Sitting Bull go back and hunt for the guide's scalp, an' the hearts of all his pale foes. Good-by, young trailer."

"Your good-by means death!" Plucky Phil said. "You would not send us away lashed thus to half-broken horses if you did not expect us to starve among the mountains of your accursed country. Cut me loose and meet me face to face. You can surround a body of United States troops and cut them to pieces, but you cannot fight a boy fairly. Sitting Bull, you are worse than the dog that gnaws the bones in your lodge, meaner and more merciless than the wolves of your mountains!"

The eyes of the stalwart chief flashed while the boy talked, but he did not reply.

His hand went up as a sign to the Indian who held the horses, and the next instant a hundred yells broke forth and twenty sticks descended upon the animals' backs.

Away they went like arrows shot from Indian bows, and scores of Sioux dashed after them with demoniac cries.

"This is leaving Sioux-land with a vengeance, Nora!" said Phil.

"It is better than captivity!" was the reply. "We are together once more! The hand of the red-man shall never separate us. When Sitting Bull slipped upon me and jerked me silently from my horse while you were gliding upon the man in the moon, his eyes emitted a devilish gleam I had never seen them possess before."

Plucky Phil did not hear more than one-half of these words. They were going away from Sitting Bull at a speed that deprived them of breath, and their followers were still making the air ring with their wild shouts.

On, on, until at last the pursuing Indians fell off like exhausted wolves. They had followed the twin Mazeppas for the purpose of urging the two horses forward as rapidly as possible, and they had returned to their leader.

Plucky Phil spoke to the steeds, but his strange voice had an ill effect, and he desisted.

Nora was exhausted. The cutting ropes had tightened, and she was constantly biting her lips to keep back shrieks of pain.

At last the animals stopped from sheer exhaustion.

The moon was approaching the horizon, and the shadows of the mountain trees looked like ghosts on stilts.

Phil turned and spoke words of cheer to the girl; but the face which she turned to him almost drew a cry of horror from his heart.

"This is the beginning of the end, Phil," she said. "We are lost, and our horses do not know where they are."

Then the girl sunk forward with a groan. She had fainted.

The young trailer grated his teeth and tugged at his bonds. He exerted all his strength, but the ropes were sinews and his limbs but flesh.

"Oh! for the strength of a Samson!" cried Phil. "Not for my sake, but Nora's!" and, having rested for a moment, he went to work again.

But he toiled in vain. The sinews seemed made of steel.

When he gave up he succeeded in getting the two horses close together, and leaning forward he gazed intently into the white face and half-closed eyes of his despairing companion.

Had he bravely entered the death-traps of Sioux-land to perish thus, reunited with Nora Dalton, but powerless to rescue her from a horrible death?

The horses stood like statues in the night; they refused to move at Phil's voice, and at last, exhausted and almost despairing, the mountain trailer dropped asleep beside the prize he had won at last.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE POLICY THAT WON.

It was a tableau which the first gray streaks of dawn did not disturb.

Side by side in one of the most picturesque parts of the land of Sioux and bear, slept the brave young couple whose lives had been devoted to each other's love.

Plucky Phil was at last awakened by a neigh from his steed. Nora slept on, her pale face pressed against her dun steed's mane. The neigh had not roused her.

The boy trailer saw the foxlike ears of his horse standing stiffly erect. The animal must have heard the advance of one of his kind.

Presently from behind a deep copse came the answering whinny of an unseen horse, but it was suddenly checked, as though a cap had been thrust over the animal's mouth.

"Weaponless and tied to a horse, I suppose I am about to furnish some Indian marksman with a target," said the boy, bitterly. "A thousand curses on the red-skin who doomed Nora and I to a fate like this."

Although he did not shrink, he fixed his eyes on the spot where he expected to catch sight of the new foe. He was glad that Nora still slept.

All at once a horse and his rider came into full view.

A startling cry rung from Plucky Phil's throat.

"I was too merciful last night!" he murmured. "She will not refuse to profit by my leniency."

Well might the invader of Sitting Bull's territory glance from his confronter to the fair young girl at his side.

Rosa, the red Jezebel, had not left the trail of vengeance. She was before him with mad eyes and grinning countenance, and her fingers rested within the boundary of her rifle-guard.

Her astonishment was no less than the boy's, but in an instant she seemed to comprehend the scene before her.

"She has discovered that we are helpless!" thought Phil. "She will not keep off!"

Their cords had been discerned by the girl's keen eyes.

"White boy and his love fall tied into Rosa's hands!" she hissed as she moved forward. Sitting Bull often send pale-faces from his huntin'-grounds tied to their horses. But he did not think he was sendin' the young whites to Rosa's rifle."

"All of which means that you are going to make the best of your opportunity for murder!" flashed Plucky Phil.

There was no reply as the rifle crept up until it touched the mane of Rosa's horse and covered the boy's breast.

Plucky Phil glanced at Nora. At that moment the girl opened her eyes.

"Alive yet, thank Heaven!" she exclaimed. "I was dreaming, Phil, that—"

She paused and started back, for Phil's quick glance at Rosa had revealed their peril.

"White Flower look how quick young trailer fall!" cried the red Jezebel. "Her become Rosa's captive for sure then!"

The cheeks of the speaker sunk once more to the rifle, and her eager finger touched the trigger when the clear report of a rifle on the right awoke the echoes of the mountain glen, and Rosa's horse staggered back shot through the head!

Down went the scarlet princess with her steed, and a moment later a lank individual appeared carrying a smoking rifle.

"I want to leave the kentry whar everybody hez a killin' policy!" he said as he came forward. "I ran you squar' into the red hornets last night when I thought I war gettin' you out ov a diffikilty. But a policy doesn't always work, Phil. Some of the best ones turn out bad. Look at that copper-colored wildcat! The hoss ar' holdin' her down, an' she's showin' all her front fangs. Came jes' in time, didn't I? Got into a scrape myself with Sittin' Bull's beauties, but I came out right side up, an' hev been huntin' you two ever since. Didn't expect to find you together? Wal I jes't did, fur a lucky stroke ov policy made me acquainted with yer ride, an' I expected to find one whar I found the other! An Injun told me all."

Rosa meanwhile was trying to separate herself from her dead horse and reach her rifle which lay undischarged on the ground a few inches beyond her hands.

Policy Pete had already severed the bonds that held the young folks captive, and he turned with a revengeful ejaculation upon the jealous girl.

Madness distended the old guide's eyes.

"Wounded er captured wildcats ought ter be killed; that's always been my policy!" he hissed, vindictively.

A moment later the career of Rosa the Sioux girl would have ended, but Plucky Phil caught the arm of the guide that held his rifle aloft.

"What kind ov a policy hev you got now, Phil?" asked Policy Pete, turning an astonished face upon the young trailer.

"She's helpless!"

"Helpless? Leave 'er five minutes, an' thar'll be a bullet in Nora's heart."

"But you sha'n't kill her as she is!" And Plucky Phil stepped resolutely between the guide and his victim. "Take the rifle up, and let her creep from beneath her hoss the best way she can. No! I'll help her out."

He offered Rosa his hand, but she refused it with scorn.

"Rosa never touch white boy's hand, but to kill!" she flashed.

"What did I tell you?" laughed Policy Pete. "She sticks like a leech to the old policy."

But Phil seized Rosa's wrist, and despite her looks, liberated her from her situation, only to see her slink away with eyes that threatened future vengeance.

"You kin go back an' hunt Goldboots!" Policy Pete said to her.

The Indian girl started at the name.

"What! is he still alive!" exclaimed Phil.

"Alive, but not ez handsome ez he used to be, boy. He lit squar'ly among the Injuns, and a hatchet sp'iled his beauty, but he's creepin' 'round somewhar. From what Sittin' Bull told me last night his photygraph wouldn't sell well in the music stores ov 'Frisco."

"Then you saw the chief himself?"

"Caught 'im nappin', ez it war. He's the Injun I referred to a while ago. We used to be friends, you know, and the old feller let me go arter I shot Coyote in the camp on account of a deed I did while I war playin' squaw-man an'

huntin' fur Nora. I made Sittin' Bull tell me what he had done to you young folks, an' that's partly how I came to be around in the nick ov time. Now don't talk about goin' back to deathdom fur Goldboots. That's not the kind ov policy we want jes' now. The Injun gal will 'tend to him, fur she owes him a grudge fur helpin' Coyote out ov the world a few minutes afore his time. We must git away. The old Injun made me a promise last night so we'll not hev the hull tribe at our heels arter all, ef we stir ourselves. Whar's Rosa?"

The Indian girl—Coyote's love—had already disappeared, and a few minutes later her stif-fening steed was the only tenant of the little glen.

Need I say that not long afterward, three persons rode up to the gates of Fort McKinney, and that one of the trio, a youth, turned to the west ere he entered the fort, and waved Sioux-land a long farewell.

The mountain trail was ended, and the Stars and Stripes once more waved over Plucky Phil and Nora Dalton.

Back in Siouxdom, in a certain wild pass, almost at the same hour when McKinney opened its gates to the trio, a rifle broke the silence of the scene, and a man fell forward on his scarred face.

Another mad hunt was over.

Captain Montana, the Pacific Nabob, would never more frequent the gambling-dens of Denver; he would no more boast how he slew Plucky Phil's father in a duel, nor would he exhibit lovely Nora Dalton as the wife of Gold-boots, the gambler sport.

Vengeance plays queer tricks in Indian-land.

Goldboots had fallen before the red Jezebel's rifle, because his hand was at Coyote's throat when the death-gurgle was announcing the approach of that desperado's end.

Rosa went back to her people, to take up with another squaw-man, but not to love him as she had loved Coyote.

Of Sitting Bull we need not speak.

Not long after the arrival at Fort McKinney, the young couple journeyed eastward as Mr. and Mrs. Steele, and the old hunter who accompanied them, was constantly talking about this policy and that.

"Your policy was to tie to the gal in the end, Phil," he remarked to the young trailer. "An' it war the boss policy, fur it surmounted every obstacle. I wouldn't giv a red fur a man without a policy ov some kind!"

THE END.

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